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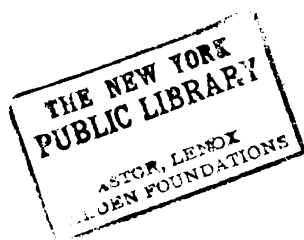




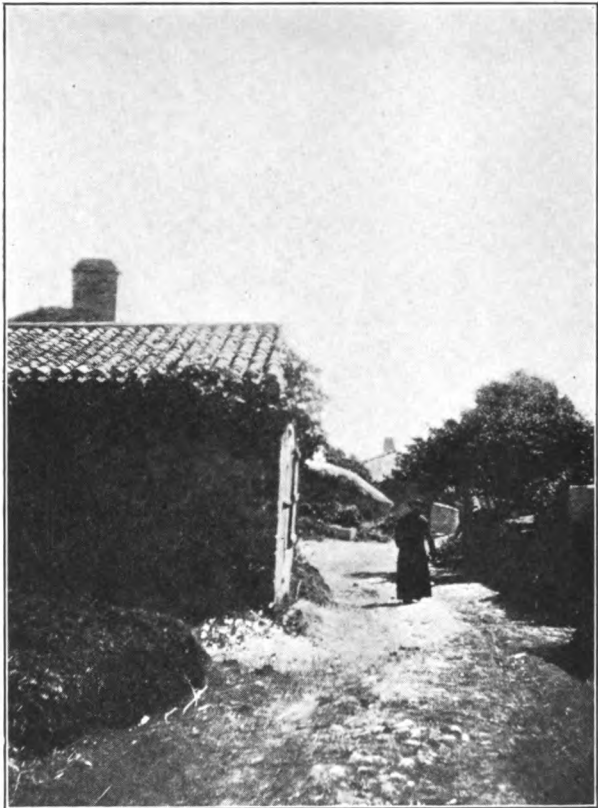












*"Along the rough passageway leading to the salt-beds."  
(Page 29)*

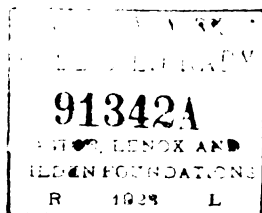
# IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

BY THE  
VERY REVEREND JAMES A. WALSH, M.A.P.  
SUPERIOR OF MARYKNOLL



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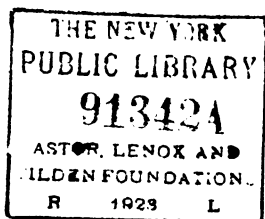
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To the  
families of Maryknoll missionaries in China,  
this little book is dedicated as an appreciation of their  
generous and unselfish spirit.  
May the Supreme Martyr reward them,  
and  
may the Queen of Martyrs protect them!



## FOREWORD

**THE** visits recorded in this volume were made several years ago and an account of them appeared shortly afterwards in **THE FIELD AFAR**, organ of the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America. They are now published in book form, so as to reach a far wider circle of readers and to interest them in the lives of these splendid young nineteenth-century martyrs.

— **THE AUTHOR**



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**ON THE HEIGHTS OF LYONS**  
**GASPARD BÉCHET**





### THE SURVIVING MOTHER OF A MARTYR



NE day toward the close of May, 1885, a telegram arrived at the Paris Seminary, containing these words "*Béchet decapité*" — (Béchet beheaded). Five weeks later a communication was received from the Bishop of West Tongking, Indo-China, stating that Father Béchet, an alumnus of the Seminary, had indeed been put to death, with three of his catechists and four other native Christians.

Gaspard Claude Béchet belonged to the city of Lyons, France, and was ordained in 1881, in which year he left Paris for his mission. After two years he was threatened with serious lung trouble and was sent out for a change of air to visit at leisure the principal Catholic settlements in the province known as Nam-dinh.

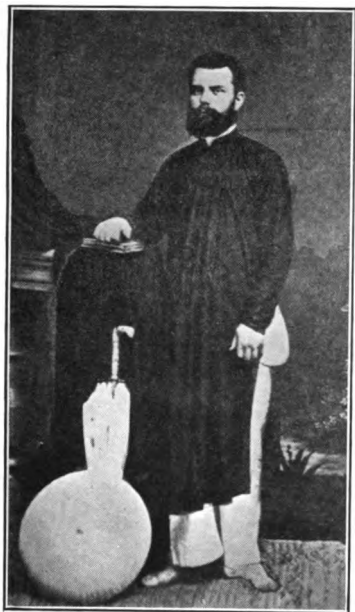
A newly appointed general of this province had just issued a circular promising thirty bars of silver to anyone bringing to him a Frenchman, and Father Béchet was evidently unaware of his danger, when,

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

after Mass on Trinity Sunday, he set out with his companions to walk to a village some miles distant. Just before noon as they were passing through a considerable settlement (Ké Hou) the priest was seized, with his friends, by a group of soldiers who took him to their captain, a sworn enemy of the Christian faith. A short interrogatory was made by the local mandarin, in reply to which Father Béchet answered that he was a missionary-priest, whose duty was simply to preach religion.

It was decided that all should be beheaded, the priest first; but the faithful group of native Christians threw themselves on Father Béchet at the moment of execution, to embrace and protect him. The young priest asked for a few moments' respite, which he used to excite his followers to perfect dispositions. Together the little group recited in loud voice the act of contrition, and Father Béchet gave absolution to his companions. The soldiers then immediately despatched the native Christians, reserving to the last the death of the priest. They wished to bind his hands, but he asked to be left free to present his neck to the sabre-blows of his executioners. This was done and so numerous were the strokes before the final severance that the neck was literally hacked to pieces.

Such was the martyrdom of Gaspard Béchet, whose "life" I happened to find in an old paper-covered volume at St. John's Seminary in Brighton



1. MADAME BÉCHET  
2. GASPARD BÉCHET  
3. RUE DES MACHABÉES







## ON THE HEIGHTS OF LYONS

(Massachusetts). I was attracted to the chapter by the fact that the subject of this biography was a comparatively recent martyr, and also by a "newsy" reference to a street and its number. The article proved indeed a "find," for the author had actually visited the mother of this Gaspard Béchet and had conversed with her on the subject of her son's heroic oblation. I read the sketch eagerly and wrote in my notebook the street address, which, by a singular coincidence, was the *Rue des Machabées*, Lyons.

I was glad, afterwards, to have done so, for unexpectedly, at the end of July in the same year, 1906, I found myself in Lyons, where by a stroke of good luck I met the priest who had first called my attention to Gaspard Béchet. My stay in the city was to be very short, but I had made up my mind to look up the *Rue des Machabées*, 17, and learn what I could about Mme. Béchet. Father B — shook his head, reminding me that the account which I had read was not at all recent and that more than twenty years had passed since Gaspard Béchet's death.

We decided, nevertheless, that a visit to the house indicated might prove fruitful, and the next morning three Boston priests said their Masses at Notre Dame, a beautiful votive basilica that from the heights of Fourvière looks down upon the lower city like a mighty sentinel. When we had in-

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

spected the marvelous interior, over which Mary presides as Queen, we went out for the customary "little breakfast" at one of the open air cafés bordering the cliff, and planned a busy morning, which I had determined should start with a search for Mme. Béchet, if she were still among the living in this great silk city.

I had my way, and we found the street, *Rue des Machabées*, after a short walk. We passed along quickly until we came to No. 17. It was a new apartment house, and the rough brick, fresh from the kiln, had not yet been covered with cement, although several families were evidently installed. There was no answer to our knock, but after some skirmishing in dark courts, which, had I been alone, would have made me feel like a book agent or a thief, we managed to draw a head from one of the lower windows. "*Does Mme. Béchet live here?*" we asked.

And the reply came quickly, accompanied by a suspicious look: "*There is no one of that name in this neighborhood.*" By this time other windows were occupied with interested auditors, from whose eyes the final vestiges of sleep were just disappearing, and an impromptu council of the court was held. No one had ever heard of the lady. And no one had ever heard of her son, the martyr. A prophet certainly seems to be without honor in his own country, I reflected. My companion urged

## ON THE HEIGHTS OF LYONS

me to give up further search, as the old lady was evidently dead and forgotten, but I pleaded for one more try, this time at the parish church, near-by.

It was not difficult to find the church, but the parochial residence — a dignified name for it — was another problem. Finally, after passing under arches centuries old, we stumbled into a court-yard littered with rubbish, and discovered a door, which had the appearance of constant use and suggested an ancient respectability that still lingered on its escutcheon. It proved to be an entrance to the Curé's home and we were admitted without delay. The Curé was not in but his assistant, a young priest, was pleased to give us all the information he possessed, which was little enough. He had heard something of Gaspard Béchet, but could not recollect anyone speaking of his mother as still alive. However, there was, he told us, an old woman around the corner, who had covered the *quartier* for three-quarters of a century and was a veritable directory of persons and happenings in *Saint Just*, as this neighborhood is called. The young priest would run down immediately and interview her, which he did, returning in a few moments with the news, quite commonplace to him, that Mme. Béchet had moved up to *Point du Jour* and was living not far from the house of the Curé there, who would certainly give us more precise directions.

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

*Point du Jour!* Was it several miles away? I asked, fearing the prospect of an impossible distance; and I was relieved to learn that ten minutes on the electric cars would take me to the object of my search. But it was time then to leave the heights and my pilgrimage to a martyr's mother must wait.

The sun was not high the next morning as I crossed the Rhone. I passed the Palace of Justice to the foot of Fourvière, and mounted the impressive hillside, just as the city below was stirring into full activity.

At the top as I left the funicular railway, that iron conqueror of rocky heights, I found an electric car marked *Point du Jour*, and entered it in accidental company with a cassocked priest to whom I told the object of my errand. *Gaspard Béchet* — it was a new name to him but he would show me the Curé's house, and within a quarter of an hour I found myself in the presence of an ascetic-looking priest, with long gray hair, whose kindly expression of countenance indicated a beautiful and simple character.

Yes, he could direct me to Mme. Béchet. "Poor woman," he added, "she will be glad to see you and to speak of her son. She lives quite alone across the street and has few friends or acquaintances." The good Curé would have talked at length, but I was pressed for time, so he searched

## ON THE HEIGHTS OF LYONS

his treasures and drew forth a photograph of Gaspard Béchet's class, which he graciously let me have. Then together we went out into the white light of the hot sun, the old priest walking bare-headed until we had reached a point directly opposite Mme. Béchet's apartment, when he bade me adieu and hastened back to his home.

I found myself before a new building not unlike that which we had visited on the previous day in the *Rue des Machabées*, — a typical French apartment house arranged for the poorer classes. I jangled the bell and the face of an old lady appeared at a window on the first floor, a few feet above the street and quite near me. *It was Mme. Béchet.* She looked at me inquiringly, anxiously I thought, and I realized the difficulty which I might have in establishing my identity. Certainly, the sidewalk and a first-story window with gathering spectators did not appeal to me as the proper setting for my inquiry, so I pronounced the good Curé's name, referred to him as my guide, and immediately Mme. Béchet drew in the shutters and the gate-bolt clicked its invitation to enter the court, where I found the object of my search ready to listen to my story.

I followed her into her simple apartment, which, so far as I could make out, consisted of a kitchen and one other room, the kitchen serving as a reception room, at least on this occasion. It was still

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

early and Mme. Béchet felt obliged to apologize for some disorder which I took for granted existed, but which, as so often happens, a man would hardly have noticed had not his attention been called to it. I stated the object of my visit, — to congratulate her as the mother of a son who had died gloriously in his battle for souls, and to secure further information about her boy with a view, when opportunity should offer, of making his life known as an inspiration to our American youth.

The poor mother's eyes filled with tears. She could not speak at first, but, rising, called my attention to several photographs of Gaspard which hung on the walls of the little room. One taken before his departure from the Paris Seminary, another in the group which the Curé had just given me, and a third in Oriental dress. "Oh, it was hard to lose him," she said at length, "so hard to be old and alone without him!" He was her only child, she told me. She knew that God was good, that she should rejoice in her son's noble example and in the thought of his eternal glory. She was conscious of his help in heaven and that he was waiting to greet her, but time passed "*oh, so slowly!*" — and his bright, cheerful disposition had been such a comfort. Even when he had left her for Tongking, his letters were always looked for so eagerly.

I asked if I might be privileged to see a few of

## ON THE HEIGHTS OF LYONS

his letters. "*Ah, his letters!*" she replied sadly. She had passed them to friends who wished to read them, and many of those precious letters had never been returned. "*Photographs?*" I could see what she had, and she would look for others, but my visit was so unexpected that she could not think, and if I would call again she would have her house in order and souvenirs at her hand. It seemed to please Mme. Béchet to be told that American Catholics are interested to know more about the Church's modern martyrs, and that her son's letters would doubtless be welcome reading and would do much good for souls.

I promised to try to visit her on my return to Lyons, and as she accompanied me to the door I requested a photograph. Mechanically, she took off her apron and stood in the passage-way, silent and sad, with just the shadow of a friendly and trusting smile, which I felt would be more marked when I should return; and with an *au revoir*, I left this mother of a martyr to think about her unusual visitor.

Later I went back to Lyons, only to find a letter that called me immediately to the north of France, and I was disappointed not to be able to call on Mme. Béchet. Fortunately, however, interested friends, priests well known in Lyons, visited Mme. Béchet on different occasions and secured a large collection of original letters.



## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

Not long after my visit, Mme. Béchet gave up her two rooms and retired to a Home in charge of some sisters in Lyons. A report reached us soon after that this good soul had already taken its flight to heaven, but later we learned that Mme. Béchet was still living, looking eagerly for the day when God should bring about the reunion for which she had waited so patiently.



**IN THE VENDÉE**  
**HENRY DORIE**





## I

### THE DRIVE TO ST. HILAIRE



HAT Henry Dorie was a martyr I knew. I had read a short sketch of his life during an ocean voyage to France, and shortly after my arrival at the Paris Seminary I had stumbled on his class photograph while looking over some mission souvenirs in the room of Father Grosjean, the kind and genial procurator. His young face was there, in a group of ten departing students, four of whom, including himself, were martyred in Korea less than two years later. Among the number was his bosom companion, Just de Bretenières.

When I next visited the *Missions Étrangères*, in the summer of 1906, I was assigned to the room which Henry Dorie had occupied as a student, and the following day, at table, I made inquiries about the martyr's birthplace. No one seemed able to recall it, for martyrs are quite common in this house, and we finally referred for information to Father Delpech. The face of the venerable priest brightened as he replied without hesitation, "Dorie

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

came from the Vendée, from the parish of St. Hilaire de Talmont."

I knew the general direction of the Vendée and there was no necessity at the moment for further information. So I pictured the young martyr's home somewhere along the west central coast of France, not a great distance from the diocese of Poitiers, with which I was already familiar through visits paid to the Curé of Assais, brother of Théophane Vénard.

A day or two later, on the occasion of a visit to Meudon, the summer house of the *Missions Étrangères*, I learned that there were no fewer than five young aspirants there from La Vendée, and among these we were delighted to find one who hailed from the parish of St. Hilaire de Talmont. This young man, Arthur Perroy, who has since departed for Eastern Asia, was then looking forward to his farewell visit home, and after giving me explicit directions, with a letter to his pastor, begged me to call on his family. In the meantime he would write to *M. le Curé*, who, he assured me, would be *enchanted* to meet an American priest; and under these conditions I decided to include in my itinerary a pilgrimage to the home of Henry Dorie.

In less than a week I was leaving the Abbé Vénard at Assais, bound northwards. I changed trains after a short run and bought a ticket at the junction for Sables d'Olonne, a seashore resort



1. HENRY DORIE
2. A LANDMARK
3. TOWN OF ST. HILAIRE





## IN THE VENDÉE

on the Vendée coast, frequented principally by French families from Paris and other inland cities. I confess that the name was utterly strange to me, but I had long since realized that my travel-knowledge was incomplete. In the meantime I settled down in a compartment which I shared with a mother and her children, all bound for the sands of Olonne. One of the little ones insisted on calling me "Papa," but aside from this occasional embarrassment I managed to enjoy the ride.

As I alighted from the train, however, an unlooked-for spectacle presented itself, which gave me the impression that a circus troupe was about to take its departure. Mingling freely with the people in waiting at the station were several women in picturesque, not to say theatrical, costume. The faces of many were old, even wrinkled, and all were sunburned, but their dress, or rather the curtailment of it, was unusual indeed. The heads were coiffed, the arms enveloped in balloon sleeves, and the skirts such as a child of twelve might wear; while the wooden shoes, high-heeled, and seemingly covered with patent leather, were used with a grace and precision that would have done credit to a dancing master. I soon learned that these were not the participants in a local side-show, but some of the natives who through successive generations had preserved the traditional dress of their ancestors.

The afternoon was rapidly going and my time



## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

was limited. St. Hilaire was some distance from Sables d'Olonne, I had learned, and could be reached by an electric train which makes three trips a day. Unfortunately the last train had gone. I was anxious, after the heat of the day, to breathe fresh air from the ocean and rest for a while looking out across the Atlantic, but the Curé of St. Hilaire was fourteen kilometers away — nearly nine miles — and to keep my schedule I must see him that night. A cab driver, mounted on his shabby coach, had been hovering over me like a vulture and actually flew in my direction when I beckoned.

I told him of my quandary and he became wonderfully sympathetic. Of course I could wait over and take the morning train for St. Hilaire. This was not the cabby's view, and in presenting it I did not conceal my anxiety to make the Curé's house if possible that night. My decision would depend upon his charge. The *cocher* saw the glitter of gold, and realizing the danger of its disappearing, he made a reasonable bargain. We started along the beach drive, giving the vacationists a slight diversion on the way, and soon passed over the meadows toward the heart of the Vendée.

It was six o'clock. The Curé would dine at seven. He was not expecting me and there was no inn at the village, I had been told. Telephone and telegraph communication were out of the question. I felt a trifle uneasy as I reflected on the uncer-

## IN THE VENDÉE

tainties, but I had experienced such fine hospitality among the priests of France and had heard the Curé of St. Hilaire praised so highly by several whom I had met, that I soon laid aside my fears and made up my mind to enjoy this ride in the cool of the evening.

The road to Talmont, of which St. Hilaire is a little suburb, was, like most French roads, excellent. The horse, after an exhibition of unusual speed along the esplanade, had settled down to a steady jog that seemed more in harmony with his appearance. We took our course to the southwest and climbed over a succession of small hills with the ocean in view for some time. Little children, bonneted like tiny grandmothers, played by the roadside and great windmills moved lazily with the shifting breezes. Hedges confined the low-lying fields dotted by innumerable small stacks of hay. From time to time as we rolled off the kilometers, that were plainly cut on little stones, we passed a wayside shrine and I wondered how long these landmarks of faith would be tolerated.

The homes which I noticed were comfortable, all of plastered brick, and several, evidently new, adorned with bright tiled roofs. The older dwellings were covered with vines and apparently surrounded by paths brilliant with flowers. Donkeys were very much in evidence, bred, I learned, in this section for the pleasure of the summer

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

boarders at Sables d'Olonne. They serve the natives, too, carrying peasants to the market and making great sport for the children of the Vendée. Our road for a long distance was lined with high banks of grass-grown earth broken occasionally with gateways made of twisted branches.

We were at *kilostone* number 7 when Mr. *Cocher* began to renew his interest in my welfare. He knew many people at St. Hilaire, he said, but no one by the name of Dorie. He had never heard that any boy around there had been martyred in Korea. It is safe to say that he had never heard of Korea and I have no doubt that he still believes it somewhere in France. Oh, these martyrs! how little do their fellow-men, near or far, know of their sacrifices for God and for souls. It matters little, at least to those soldiers of Christ whose crimson-jeweled crowns were not gained with the plaudits of the world, but it is to be regretted that the saintly lives and heroic deaths of our contemporaries pass unnoticed and unknown by many to whom they would be an edification and a strength.

We had climbed to a point from which a long double row of pine trees ran for a distance of nearly five hundred feet. This was evidently an entrance to some estate and, as the driver informed me that a well-known château lay at the end of the avenue, I recalled the fact that Henry Dorie was a protégé of a certain nobleman of Talmont who had at first

## IN THE VENDÉE

strenuously opposed his idea of going to the foreign missions.

We were still four kilometers from St. Hilaire, but as we reached the brow of the hill I could see in the distance the church spire of the little village. "*Voilà!*" said the expectant one in the box above, as he pointed his whip straight before him — "*le clocher de St. Hilaire, — un joli clocher, n'est-ce-pas?*" I agreed with him. I always do when a Frenchman says "*N'est-ce-pas?*" about some indifferent subject and I am tired; but on this occasion, I was quite of Mr. *Cocher's* opinion.

We rose to another hill. The sun was preparing for a dying burst of light; the green of the hedges seemed suddenly to become more brilliant, and the new-mown fields looked whiter. Then the great ball in the heavens sank, not to its death, but to its rest and *le coucher du soleil* was accomplished. The horse with shuffling steps plodded down a fairly steep grade where the air was so damp and uncomfortably chilled that I began to wonder if the plates had all been cleared away at the Curé's house and if his housekeeper was a crank. From my experience at Assais\* and elsewhere, I knew that curiosity about an American priest would stimulate the *bonne* in a small French village to such an extent that she could even forget she was work-

\* The birthplace of Theophane Venard.

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

ing; and I felt that this curiosity would last long enough for present needs. On the other hand, I recalled one instance when the lady of the house became so curious, under similar circumstances, that she quite forgot to work.

The toilers were returning from the fields. Our carriage passed close to them and I was tempted to inquire if any were related to my little martyr-friend, but time was a consideration and it might take those worthy peasants some moments to recover from the shock of such a question.

Our road at length took a turn and we drove into the picturesque town of Talmont, with its river at our feet, its castle ruins on the banks above, and a dignified church commanding all. Most of the people were resting on the porches after the heat of the day, the men bare-headed, the women in whitened coiffes, and they nodded a respectful salute.

It took our steed but a few moments to pass the limits of this parish, and another turn to the left led us into a well-paved street arched with trees and broken only by a bridge of stone, under which a little stream ran swiftly, almost in the shadow of the pretty *flèche* of St. Hilaire. In a moment we had passed the church and I found myself in a small settlement of neat houses, somewhat crowded together, all opening into a narrow street that followed the line of the Curé's garden-

## IN THE VENDÉE

wall. At the gate I left the carriage but did not dismiss my driver, as the terrible fear had come to me that the good man of the house might be away. I yanked at the bell-wire and prepared for the worst—but I did not have to return with Mr. *Cocher*.

A young priest opened the gate rather suddenly and somewhat upset my ideas of French clerical propriety by appearing in citizen's clothing or a tucked-up cassock—I could not discern which—leading a bicycle. He was about to go on a sick-call but he assured me that the Curé was at home and pointed to an open door. I had hardly taken a step when my venerable host appeared, smiling his recognition and extending a cordial welcome.

He had been looking for the passing stranger and he knew that I was on my way from Assais and must be tired after so long a journey. Dinner was over, but not for me, and if he had been certain that I was coming all would have waited. Now, if I would be so good as not to mind the delay, the meal would soon be prepared. It was not hard to be good enough under such conditions, so I acquiesced graciously and walked out into the deepening twilight with the good priest, up and down through his extensive gardens, until we were summoned to a very cozy dinner provided for the late comer—who enjoyed it quite as much as Madame the Cook enjoyed the spectacle of an American being fed.

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

My bedroom at St. Hilaire was a large, clean, well-aired apartment that looked out to fields beyond, and over the old church, which serves as an apse to the present structure. I never had experienced such a stillness, so far as I can recall. The insect creation evidently followed the custom of the villagers to retire at nine o'clock — in separate apartments, I hoped, and so it proved. I slept undisturbed, using only one of the two beds with which the room was provided, and so soundly that I did not wake until the housekeeper next morning gave my door a vigorous knock, which I could hardly pretend later not to have heard.

It was still early but the Curé had gone into the church and the Mass bell was ringing. When I reached the sacristy, I was instructed to prepare for Mass at one of the two altars in the old church. At the other altar a requiem service was being chanted. These altars were at either side of the church, in the centre of which stood a line of huge columns. There was no high altar. Henry Dorie knew and loved this place of worship, where, like the sabot-shod boy who served me, he, too, had often assisted at the Holy Sacrifice. The requiem was not disturbing although the choir consisted of one man, the sexton, as at Assais, who also represented the mourners. This individual sang, without accompaniment or score, quite correctly and tolerably well.

## II

### THE DORIE HOME



THE good Curé had agreed to serve me as guide to the home of Henry Dorie. He decided that we should make an early start for the Dorie home, leaving soon after breakfast, and while the sexton was hitching the horse he proposed that we should go across the street and visit the family of the aspirant whom I had met at Meudon.

It was a pleasant experience. We were evidently expected and the family had thoughtfully gathered so that we should not lose time on their account. The father was a follower of St. Joseph's trade; the sisters, dressmakers; two brothers worked in the fields; and these, with the mother, a splendid type, and her absent son, now consecrated to God, made up the Christian home.

It is needless to say that these excellent people were delighted to receive direct news of their boy. They spoke of his approaching vacation, that farewell visit among them — now past — and wondered to what mission he would be assigned. Henry Dorie's name was mentioned and *Monsieur le Curé*



## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

assured his little group of parishioners that in these days the chances for martyrdom were very slim. One of the girls shook her head with an anxious expression and instanced some recent massacres in the Far East. They all appeared perfectly resigned, however, and their cheerful spirit was quite delightful. When a week later I met Arthur Perroy in Paris I felt that my journey to the Vendée was worthwhile if only for the pleasure which in turn it afforded him and his dear ones at home.

The Curé's horse was now ready, a white one, whose hair remained on my coat for a week. I closed the camera, after taking a group picture in the back yard, shook hands all around, and mounted an affair on wheels which had been drawn up alongside the doorstep. *Mounted* is hardly the proper word to express the idea, as the vehicle seemed to be almost on a level with the pavement. Yet, for all I knew, it might once have been a public cab in Paris — many years ago, of course. The springs had settled down since then to their long sleep, the canopy had disappeared, and the sun had left no sign of varnish or vestige of color.

The horse was positively fat, well-fed, as a priest's horse is usually, and, as I soon discovered, of a retiring disposition. "*Allons, allons* — let us go!" chirped the good Curé, and the faithful beast turned his head toward us but did not stir. "*Allons!*" again he cried, jerking the reins. This time the

## IN THE VENDÉE

animal responded and dropped into a respectable jog, which he kept up for several paces. Chirps, jerks, starts and halts in constant succession will tell the story of this journey.

Soon after leaving the village we turned towards the sea. The land on all sides was low, with here and there, in the distance, a house nestling in a clump of trees. Once the Curé called my attention to an old monastery, and a little further on to a castle. No buildings adjoined the road until we came to a small group of dwellings in one of which, my host told me, the martyr's married sister was living. We did not stop, however, as it had suddenly dawned upon the Curé that it was market-day and we must hasten so as to reach the Dorie homestead before it was deserted.

I could now discern some hillocks, snow-white, and I asked what they were. The Curé smiled, delighted at the prospect of explaining the phenomena. "*Vous allez voir*," he said, "*vous allez voir! Allons, allons!*" and the horse made a fresh start for the hundredth time. Yes, I was going to see, and the good priest soon explained that Henry Dorie's relatives, like most of the dwellers in the hamlet which we were approaching, were salt makers, and that these hillocks were great heaps of the mineral reclaimed from the ocean. "*Voilà!*" he exclaimed, pointing with his whip to the left, "the salt heaps of our friend Dorie. These are his

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

principal means of support, although he has also a small farm."

We could see no one at work, but we soon came to the clustered dwellings which go by the name of La Guitière. An old well stood guard over the double file of weather-beaten houses that rose from the marsh-lands, bare and shelterless as the hulk of some great wreck on a weed-strewn beach. The settlement was made up of about ten small houses, occupied, I understood, for the most part by relatives of the Dorie family. A driveway enabled us to enter from the main road, and the Curé at once released his horse from the royally curved shafts in which the animal had been confined and tied him in the shade of a hay-loft. In the meantime our arrival had created something of a stir, and already a few of the matrons had come out to greet their pastor, wondering, doubtless, what might be the purpose of his call on such a day, when the hamlet was deserted for the busy scenes at Talmont.

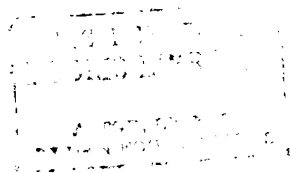
We had evidently arrived too late to catch the market-goers, and the women shook their heads when the Curé asked if there was anybody at the Dorie homestead. The old gentleman had long since learned, however, not to place too much reliance on second-hand information; so, beckoning to me, we passed through a tiny garden opposite and knocked at the door of one of the several low



*"There he was, the man with the hoe." (Page 29)*



*"She might have stepped from some old canvas." (Page 32)*



## IN THE VENDEE

dwellings that lined the narrow street. There was no sound within, and after a brief delay I followed my guide along the rough passageway leading to the salt-beds. As we came in view of the widening marshes, the old Curé gave a grunt of satisfaction — “ *Le voilà, le neveu du martyr!* ”

There he was, the man with the hoe, in sabots and straw hat, gathering in heaps of white mineral, reclaimed by evaporation from the waters of the ocean. The nephew of Henry Dorie had, fortunately for us, stayed at home, while his father, the martyr's brother, had gone to Talmont, and we had missed him on our way. This nephew, whose Christian name I do not now recall, was a young man of pleasing address and intelligent appreciation, — not uncommon qualities among the laboring classes of France. He showed us the simple process of salt-making, and, leaving the hot sun to continue its work unaided, returned with us to his humble home, which he invited us to enter.

Only two weeks before I had been entertained at the Château de Bretenières, where Just de Bretenières, the bosom friend and martyr companion of Henry Dorie, had been reared. The contrast now was striking in the extreme. We entered directly into a good-sized room that seemed to answer almost every household purpose. There was nothing of interest to attract the ordinary visitor, and it seemed like intrusion to look too

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

inquisitively at the evidences of homely thrift that presented themselves.

I asked if I might see the martyr's room and we mounted a flight of worn sandstone steps that led immediately from this living-room to a kind of loft where grain was stored along with household articles. In one corner, separated by a thin partition of wood, was the little bed-room, with a few shelves of school books, a statue of the Blessed Virgin, a first Communion certificate, and some holy pictures spread here and there high on the low-ceilinged walls.

I took down several books, and looking through the pages, discovered two slips of paper, both precious souvenirs, which the nephew, at the Curé's request, generously allowed me to keep. One of these was the last section of a letter, written, evidently, while the future martyr was on his way to Korea. It reads as follows:

I do not forget you. I think of you often. Even this morning I seemed to see you asking M. l'Abbé if any news had come; and then I prayed God to give you strength and courage.

Courage, dearest parents, love God always and much. Offer to Him your sufferings and your labor, and He will recompense you one day.

In the meantime, as you see, I write to you as often as possible, and I promise to keep it up. I would like even to write to each of you individually, but that is quite impossible, especially until we get to Singapore.

## IN THE VENDEE

When I arrive at Shanghai I can more easily send you fuller details and make a review of my voyage.

My beard is beginning to grow and I am as ugly as a monkey.

Adieu, the heat is stifling me, and I will go on deck for some air. We expect to see the African coast in a few hours. Adieu.

Your son who loves you,

H. DORIE, M. Ap. to Korea.

Taking down, again at random, a second book, there dropped from it a small piece of paper about four inches in length. I picked it up and found, inside, a promoter's list of members in the Lyons Society for the Propagation of the Faith. The martyr's name was first on the list, followed by eight others. Against each name was checked, in centimes, amounts paid in February, March and June (the year not given). The "band" was made up possibly of students at the College of Sables d'Olonne, but of this we are not certain.

With these two precious souvenirs of the martyr in my possession, for which special thanks are due to the Curé of St. Hilaire, we went from the humble dwelling out into the little street of the hamlet, where we found an informal committee of the stay-at-homes waiting to greet their pastor. I was introduced simply as an American priest, whose name could be recalled no more than it could be pronounced; and as my host left me to superintend



## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

the harnessing of his horse, I clicked the camera, to the delight of all present, who crowded around the instrument with the usual expression — “*très curieux!*”

They were a kindly, simple people, whom I recall with much pleasure. Even now I can see, as the horse ambled off amid the *au revoirs*, one poor woman at the well that guards the entrance to the hamlet. Bronzed by the sun and wrinkled with age, she might have stepped from some old canvas. She little knew the impression made on our film as she turned to look at the departing visitors.

We arrived at the presbytery in good time for lunch, which had been prepared so that I could catch the train for Sables d'Olonne. It was with regret that I left my kind host and his *vicaire* that day; and as a few moments later I settled down in the “express” bound for the famous Vendée watering place, I could not help feeling that my stay had been all too short.

The “express” was made up of one car, divided into several compartments, including one for cattle. The moving power might have been electricity, but my recollection is only of several stops and slow going. At a station on the public highway there was considerable delay in landing one of our traveling companions in the forward section, — a newly bought pig, who evidently felt uncomfortable at the prospects of a strange sty. After some mo-

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ments of coaxing and pulling, a burly fellow took the animal by the ear, accomplished the desired result, and the car moved on with whistle, shrieks, and squeals, each striving for the ascendancy.

In Sables d'Olonne I found a courteous welcome at the College where Henry Dorie had studied, and where today his name is held in benediction as an alumnus who won the martyr's crown. He was not considered a brilliant student, I learned, and had to spend more time than the ordinary boy in the preparation of his lessons. <sup>1</sup> But his disposition, modest yet gay, secured for him the abiding affection of all his companions. It was during these years that his vocation to the foreign missions developed strongly, and, among other letters written by him as a student, is one to an intimate friend containing these words — "*I wish to give myself wholly to Our Lord: to work, to suffer all my life, and to die for Him and for the spread of His Kingdom on earth.*"

I found at the College only the professors, as it was the vacation season. They were young men, diocesan priests, keen and intelligent, especially curious to find out the workings of the Catholic Church in the United States. They had all read the Abbé Klein's work on the "Land of the Strenuous Life." The book, in spite of the French suspicion that it is somewhat highly colored, has probably done more than any other to open the

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

eyes of French priests to the actual condition of the Catholic religion in this country. It was now discussed by several of those present, and many questions were asked.

When train time had come I left the peaceful cloister where we had been walking in the cool evening air, and, the faculty serving as escort, we joined the summer people in their promenade along the seashore drive, and made towards the railway station. We were none too soon and the Superior very nearly occasioned my arrest by encouraging me to mount the train for Paris without a ticket; but "all's well that ends well" and before midnight, by several Providential and accidental circumstances, I managed to have the compartment quite alone until we arrived in Paris, which I reached safely with pleasant recollections of the home of Henry Dorie.



**AT DIJON**  
**JUST DE BRETENIÈRES**





## I

### *THE CHATEAU OF BRETENIÈRES*



HE great lines of railway from Paris to Lausanne and Marseilles run through Dijon. We took a morning train out of the capital, determined on our way to Lyons to stop over and meet, if possible, the brother of Just de Bretenières.

Dijon was preparing for the national holiday, when we arrived on the eve of June the fourteenth, at about four o'clock. The cab-driver whom we selected was well acquainted with the Abbé de Bretenières—who in the city did not know him, he asked. So we settled ourselves on the hot leather cushions under a white carriage-umbrella, that threatened to collapse as we jumped over the pavements along the main thoroughfare, past interesting groups of statuary, into the great square. Then leaving the tramway line our driver turned into a narrow street and, with a jerk, drawing up his lank animal at an ornamental doorway flanked by solid walls of masonry, signaled us to

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

alight. We did so willingly enough, and pulled a worn bell-handle that hung at the side of the gate. We were before the entrance of Saint Francis de Sales College, of which Father Christian de Bretenières was the founder and principal.

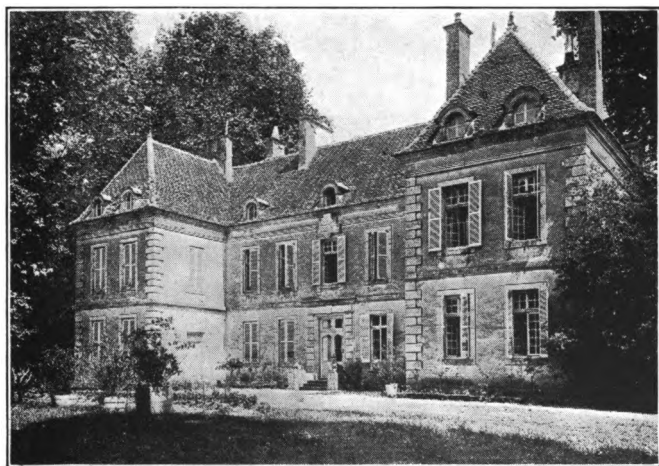
The *concierge*, typical of his class, appeared. Was M. de Bretenières at home? He squared off a pace or two and looked at us suspiciously. What we probably were in the mind of this worthy porter was soon discovered. He asked us if we were trying to sell books and did not seem satisfied when we made reply in the negative. Hesitating a moment, he directed us to a small waiting-room in the courtyard and disappeared.

Several minutes passed and the street gate again creaked on its great hinges. A young priest who had evidently just returned from his walk appeared. We saluted, stated briefly the object of our visit, explained our limited time, and finally succeeded in moving him to make an inquiry. He left us suddenly and the *concierge* returned, looked us over again and said — not a word. I was getting desperate, when the priest came to inform us that M. de Bretenières was away from the city but would probably be visible the next day.

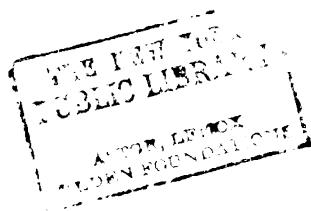
This was discouraging, as we expected by that time to be in Lyons. The priest suggested that we come early in the morning and, deciding to wait



1. JUST DE BRETENIÈRES
2. HIS MOTHER
3. THE CHÂTEAU







## AT DIJON

over, we asked permission to take photographs. We found the "open sesame" to a good heart as soon as we disclosed our nationality. Did we know Father A — of the Boston archdiocese, who taught in the Catholic University of Washington? We were surprised at the question, but soon learned that our interviewer, a professor under M. de Bretenières, had translated into French a volume on Buddhism, the work of this American priest about whom he had asked. All barriers fell to the ground and we made a triumphal entry into the inner court of the de Bretenières Castle.

The College which flourished there was conducted on a high intellectual level and was widely known. The tuition was considerable for France, but the material advantages and the excellent courses of instruction drew to the school regularly more than three hundred young men, who were taught by a finely trained body of professors, most of whom were members of the diocesan clergy, each in his line a specialist.

Our guide conducted us at once to the chapel, — devotional and artistic in every detail. Above in the gallery over the entrance and enclosed in a space once occupied as the elder brother's bed-chamber, a room had been fitted up to contain various souvenirs of the martyr. Here Just passed studious and restful hours during eight years of his life. His bed was kept in one corner of this,

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

a screened and hallowed enclosure. Near it hung his seminary cloak and a much-faded hat. An oil-painting of the martyr, the work of his devoted cousin, Mme. de Bretenières, was on the wall, above a treasure-case filled with relics and precious memorials. What seemed to be the armor of a Korean soldier stood grimly on guard at one corner.

In the meantime we learned that the family originally possessed two other homes,—one, now a sub-prefecture, where Just was born, at Chalon-sur-Saône, about an hour's railway journey towards Lyons; the other, still owned by Father Christian, at Bretenières, a small village five to six miles outside of Dijon and then the residence of Mme. de Bretenières, who, we were assured, would be pleased to receive a visit from anyone interested in her beloved young martyr. We made up our mind to go at once to Bretenières before sunset, so as to secure photographs; and in a short quarter of an hour we were well out of the city and on our way.

The country was delightful and the road-bed even and hard. Our horse, stimulated by another that followed us closely, made a special effort to show his mettle. The vehicle behind us was a noisy market-wagon, drawn by a heavy animal and carrying three sun-browned peasants who had delivered a load of fruit at the jam factory

## AT DIJON

in Dijon, and were returning with empty cans, full stomachs, and more or less replenished purses. We passed at good speed through several hamlets and after a considerable stretch of plain came to the village of Bretenières.

We recognized it by the graceful chateau, which a turn of the road brought into view, set in from the street, well shaded, with lawns extending on three sides as far as the eye could see. With a wave of the hand to our "pursuers," who had helped us more than they knew, we drove past the lodge to the entrance of the château. The blinds were closed and the place looked deserted, but a ring at the side-door brought the house-dog, followed by a servant, who to our dismay informed us that Mme. de Bretenières had gone into the village and would not be home until late. This was not pleasant and we began an explanation of our mission. It was quite useless.

We suggested waiting, but the searching, curious eyes betrayed the hope that we should go, — and soon. We wondered if the sun, now rapidly sinking, would help us to impress at least the outside of the house on our memories, and borrowing a chair from the reluctant maid, who deputed a man-servant to fetch the article, we posed the apparatus, attempted a few views, and mechanically folded the instrument, debating whether we should delay longer or return to the city. The decision was announced

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

by a series of barks from the dog, who suddenly bounded down the path as Mme. de Bretenières appeared, accompanied by her brother and a nephew. She had been disappointed in her visit, and, happily for us, had at once returned.

The mistress of the castle at Bretenières was the widow of an exemplary and much-loved gentleman — a first cousin of Just and Christian — who died a few years before, and whose loss she had doubly felt since they were childless. She was a woman of middle age, cultured in mind and heart, and devoted, as we afterwards learned, to the poor of her village, whom she visited regularly. She received us graciously and begged us to enter. Tea was served in the great hall, and I tried to imagine that I could see Just taking his own place in these pleasant surroundings of his youth.

The conversation naturally drifted to America and the condition of the Church in France, until we turned the good lady's thoughts to the object of our errand. She brought us some photographs, and at our request pointed out the room occupied by Just. It was spacious, well-lighted and richly furnished. There the future martyr slept; there, too, he studied, under the constant direction of tutors, during the period preparatory to his college-course. Christian had occupied the adjoining chamber, and I recalled a query which the Abbé d'Hulst has noted. Both

## AT DIJON

of these boys were much attached to their home at Bretenières, and when Christian was old enough to realize that it would fall eventually into the hands of his elder brother the little fellow asked Just if he himself would have to leave it then. The answer came immediately: "Don't worry, Christian, it will never belong to me, for I am going to be a priest. It will be yours." And so it was Christian's, although he, too, had become a priest. But he was a steward and not the master of his Master's goods.

We learned that the mother of these two sons exercised a constant vigilance over their lives, aiming especially to keep them from habits of idleness. To this end she held before them the highest ideals and always the supernatural motive. At times, forgetting their tender years, she used expressions which she felt on reflection were quite incomprehensible to her boys. These words were not always lost, however, for Mme. de Bretenières recalled one occasion when the mother overheard Christian asking what she meant by "perfection." Just answered that "perfection is like a high mountain, very high: it costs much time and labor to reach the top, but one need not get discouraged for we can always get there if we wish."

One of the several tutors brought to Bretenières for the boys' instruction was a young German priest to whom they both became much attached. Just

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

wanted to know from his mother if all priests were saints, and when he was delicately reminded that they were not all in that particular class he insisted that Father W. was, because he could see an aureole around his head when he taught catechism. Just referred to Christian in proof of this, but the latter could not give similar evidence. From this tutor the boys acquired, in addition to the regular course of studies, an excellent knowledge of German and English and a special taste for geology.

In vacation time traveling was the chief diversion of the family, including the father and often the mother. Their excursions were oftenest on foot, a bag on their backs, a geologist's hammer in their hands. For nine years they spent their summers in this way, climbing the mountains and traversing nearly all the valleys of Switzerland, Savoy and the Vosges; and they did not lack adventures which served to enliven the fireside conversations on their return. On one occasion they were arrested as suspected perpetrators of a daring and sacrilegious robbery, and led through a town by five policemen, surrounded by a great crowd, — the evidence being hammers, chisels, and other instruments found on their persons.

Minerals, fossils, insects and birds were the object of their unceasing care during the whole year. To increase their knowledge, they visited natural

## AT DIJON

history museums and corresponded with scientific men; until a celebrated geologist, who had them received into the Geological Society of France, said that he could teach them nothing more concerning the nature of rocks.

Just's tutor, seeing him apparently so absorbed in his rocks and birds, even after his vocation had become clearly manifest and his parting from home near at hand, said to him one day at Bretenières: "What if you have to leave all this?" "Oh, that will not be hard," Just replied. "Don't you see I am only occupied with it on account of my father and brother? It interests them now, and will take up their minds when I am gone."

The vacation journeys had another charm for Just, since in them he found opportunities to discipline himself for the rough life of a missionary. His vocation was always on his mind, and to brave heat and cold, fatigue and thirst, was his schooling for the apostolate. He never lightened his clothing under the burning sun, nor added to it on entering a cold valley. He always lifted the heaviest rocks and gayly carried the weightiest sacks.

A proper appreciation of the fine arts, especially of music and painting, was given to the boys here at Bretenières, and when Just was eighteen years of age he succeeded in passing a brilliant examination at Lyons, on which occasion he secured the Bachelor's degree. In the same year the two young



## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

men together translated into French a work of two volumes on Christian Art, by Dr. Neumayer, whom they had met in Germany and who expressed his surprise at their proficiency in his language, as at their knowledge of philology, history, and philosophy.

It was while living at Bretenières that Just made known to his parents his desire to become a priest. They were quite reconciled to this idea but urged him to wait for two years on account of his influence over Christian, and he readily followed their wishes. The Dominicans attracted him, but when he learned that he could not be assured of a foreign mission if he joined this order he consulted the Superior-General of the Sulpicians, who advised him to enter the Seminary at Issy, near Paris, where he could begin his ecclesiastical studies and later come to a decision about his future field of labor.

These were interesting reminiscences which the interior of the château vividly recalled, but equally welcome was the invitation extended by Mme. Bretenières to visit the garden where Just had manifested so strongly, when a very little fellow, his call to the Far East. We passed out of the hall doorway across the lawn to a path which led several hundred feet away to a simple cross erected in memory of this incident, to which I shall refer later. Christian, who was a witness, told all to us the

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next day with his own lips. We knelt as pilgrims for a moment's prayer, then sauntered on to the little chapel where Mme. Bretenières, her servants, and the people round about gather regularly for the services of the Church. In the crypt of this chapel lie the bodies of the Bretenières and in the church-yard under the shadow of the façade sleep the villagers of other days.

Returning along the path, we plucked a few leaves from a vine that clung around the base of the memorial cross and I thought of this child of wealth struck to death for his love of Christ. The age of martyrs has certainly not passed. In some unknown spot in far-away Korea, lay the mangled remains of Just Bretenières and his companions,\* and today, out of that soil, crimsoned by their blood, the tree of faith is bearing precious fruit. "The bodies of the saints are buried in peace and their names will live forever. The souls of the saints rejoice in heaven,—they who have followed in the footsteps of Christ, because for love of Him they have poured out their blood." (Breviary.)

In the cool of the early evening we drove back to Dijon, silent and happy. Just had taken this road when he left for the *Missions Étrangères* of Paris. The Abbé d'Hulst, who knew him at that period, thus describes the young aspirant: "His

\* The body of Just de Bretenières was later removed to Dijon, France, at the request of his brother.

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

tall figure plainly indicated health and strength; his countenance, usually pale, gave evidence of an energetic temperament; his lofty brow, framed by wavy hair, was full of nobility, but the greatest charm of his features was his eyes of infinite sweetness, wherein shone the light of courage. The frankness and modesty of his glance inspired confidence at once."

I recalled, too, on this occasion, the late beloved Father Barbier, S.M., of Boston, who remembered the day of Just's departure and had spoken to me of the event. The Barbier home was near Dijon. The driver of the carriage which had taken the future martyr to the railway station halted his horses and announced the news to Father Barbier, then a young student. The *cocher* was quite indignant that this youth with such brilliant prospects should deliberately fling them aside and go off to China to be killed, and as he drove away he remarked with considerable vehemence that Just de Bretenières was a fool.

And so he was, but it is fortunate for the rest of us, I mused, that there are occasionally to be found in the world such fools; for the foolishness of the world is the wisdom of Christ. Would that there were more fools for His sake!

We crossed the little bridge, made a final turn of the road, and passed through the city to our hotel. The streets were gayly decorated and

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brilliantly lighted. A band was playing in the square, and several biographs were amusing the people with pictures thrown high above their heads, for the world of Dijon had begun in earnest the celebration of the festival. Tired, and fortunate in finding quiet rooms, we were soon asleep and our slumber was unbroken, as the "night before" in France is not made sleepless by intermittent explosions of cannon crackers under one's window.

## II

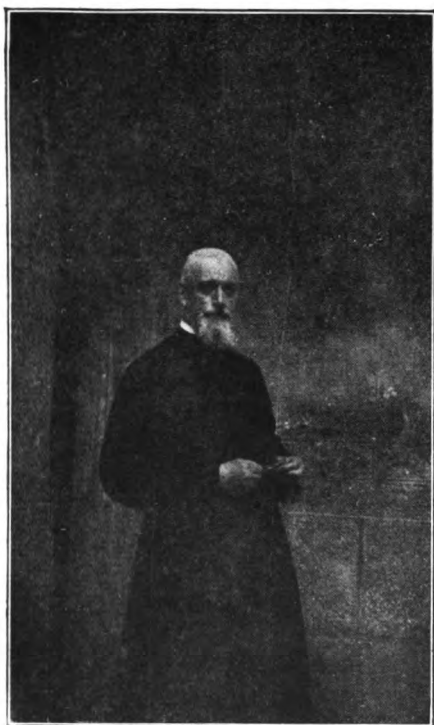
### *REMINISCENCES OF THE MARTYR'S BROTHER*



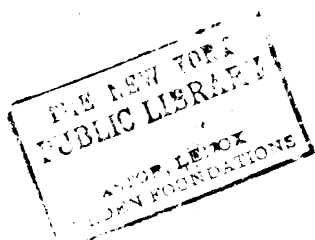
**S**HORTLY after nine o'clock on the morning of July the fourteenth, we found ourselves at Dijon in the courtyard of the College of Saint Francis de Sales — and without delay were shown to the room of Father de Bretenières.

Christian de Bretenières was at the time sixty-eight years of age. Above six feet in height, he still carried himself erect, and with his bronzed face, gray hair and trimmed beard, had all the appearance of a retired army officer. Father de Bretenières was a little hard of hearing and talked — fortunately for us — slowly, with perfect articulation and graceful speech, making us feel at once that we should profit much by our brief visit; for brief it must be, since trains do not wait for ordinary men and our Lyons express was due at noon.

It did not take long for Father de Bretenières to place us. He spoke most kindly of Father A —, a former Sulpician professor at the Seminary in Boston and later in Dijon; of the good Carmelites



**FATHER CHRISTIAN DE BRETENIÈRES**



## AT DIJON

in the former city, with whom he had been in correspondence; and finally of our visit to Bretenières the day before, which last-named subject led at once to that of his martyred brother.

At the request of my companion, who was eager to hear from the lips of this priest a description of the striking incident which in the early youth of the two brothers had happened at Bretenières, our host entered enthusiastically into the story.

Although the circumstances occurred when Christian and Just were only four and six years old, respectively, our host recalled them perfectly, — the place along the garden walk where both had been digging at play, Christian's withdrawal for the purpose of starting a new hole, the piercing cry from Just that brought to his side the younger brother and their nurse, who had been knitting a few yards away, Just pointing excitedly into the new-made opening and asking if they did not see the unusual spectacle, his perfect description of the Chinese who appeared to him and were *beckoning him to go to them*.

Christian himself and the nurse were nonplussed, he told us; they could see nothing except dirt and stones, and the smaller boy returned to his play while the nurse doubtless wondered if Just could be ill. Later in the day she told Mme. de Bretenières what had happened, but the incident seems to have passed almost immediately out of the



## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

mother's mind, as, in fact, out of the memory of all concerned. Just himself never referred to it, Christian said, until twenty years later, on the eve of his departure for Eastern Asia.

Father de Bretenières then diverted our thoughts to the development of his brother's vocation to the foreign missions. Following the decision of the Superior-General of the Sulpicians, Just had entered the Seminary at Issy where he pursued the usual ecclesiastical courses, also serving the community as organist. I recalled a notice of him in the Sulpician register, which reads:

*De Bretenières, Just, from Nov. 19, 1859, to July 15, 1861; was for two years the edification of the Seminary by his piety, and our delight by an incomparable gentleness and agreeable nature. His talents, perfected by an excellent education received entirely at home, prepared him for great things.*

In May, 1861, he reached a positive decision to enter the Foreign Mission Seminary, and on the occasion of their next visit to Paris he announced this intention to his parents, who had rented apartments in the city so as to be near their son. M. de Bretenières was quite overcome as he realized fully not only the separation but the danger to Just's life. The mother prayed as her boy spoke his wish and found the grace to thank God for

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the honor bestowed upon her. Notwithstanding her heroic resolve, however, Father Christian said, she could not conceal her feelings. Just was received at the Seminary in the *Rue du Bac* — and as it was vacation time he was allowed to return to Bretenières with his parents for a few weeks.

During these days at home, he suffered considerably, as the family afterwards learned, from witnessing the silent grief of his parents. Christian himself also felt severely the pain of the anticipated separation and frankly expressed his feelings to the elder brother, who became keenly conscious of the misery which he was occasioning to those whom he loved so dearly.

Before leaving for Paris, Just accompanied the family to their château in Dijon and after spending the night where we were sitting, the family made a short pilgrimage to the *Fontaine de Dijon*, outside the city. St. Bernard, we knew, was born there and there bade adieu to family, position, estate and brilliant prospects for the love of Christ. The coincidence impressed us — but this fact did not mean so much to Father Christian as did the words uttered by the priest at the Gospel of the Mass that day: “Everyone that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my name’s sake, shall receive a hundred-fold and shall possess life everlasting.”

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

Father Christian made no allusion to his brother's departure for Paris at this time but seemed anxious that we should realize as fully as possible some of the beautiful traits which showed themselves in the martyr during his stay in the *Rue du Bac*. Just found the spirit of this School of Martyrs quite different from that of the Sulpician Seminary in Issy. It was more rugged; there was greater freedom and more fraternal familiarity. As we had come from a week's stay at this Seminary, where we too had remarked the atmosphere, we could appreciate the words which the young aspirant wrote home at this time to Christian and his parents.

Christian followed his brother's thought with intense interest. He himself had been inclined to take up law as a profession and was already pursuing studies to this end. At Paris he attended the Sorbonne — and evidently during this period the brothers saw much of each other. During Just's second year at the *Rue du Bac* Christian began to feel the call to the altar. He had been impressed by the oft-repeated words of his elder brother — "*I am like a bell, I have only one tone — all is vanity except to love God.*" That year as vacation days were coming to a close, the two brothers went out to Issy, where Christian remained to make a retreat before taking up his studies for the priesthood.

## AT DIJON

As Christian was speaking to us, I could not help thinking that the father of these two young men — the only offspring — must naturally have been greatly disappointed in the thought that neither of them would perpetuate his name and the traditions of his family, but Christian said nothing of this. It was only afterwards that I noticed in a letter written by Just to his father these words:

I was under the impression, at first, that I had entered a Society whose members were happy and gay, but who took life easy, just as it comes, and where there was not much interior work; but I was greatly mistaken. I soon understood that a house from which men go forth to war against Satan, thoroughly armed for conquest, must needs be the object of God's most abundant grace. Such is indeed the case. If you come on this winter, I will tell you many things that will astonish you perhaps, and which prove that the race of the saints is far from being extinct.

Let me assure you that the prospect of separation does not in the least cast a gloom over their spirits. On the contrary, there is perhaps no community where frank gaiety reigns so openly. The good God recompenses already the first sacrifices, and the desire for greater ones, by a perfect tranquillity of soul. Our Lord bestows on these future apostles a charity by which it is impossible not to be struck at first sight; directors and aspirants have but one heart and one soul, the same thoughts, the same desires. There is here such a high degree of virtue that I, a poor beginner, can scarcely understand it.

There will soon come a day that has no end, when

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

you will rejoice at not having made gallant cavaliers out of your two sons, but, please God, good fathers of families. For such Christian and I shall be, only of a kind that will not be troubled with housekeeping.

Just was ordained on May 21, 1864, and Christian received tonsure the same day. The departure for Korea took place July 15, and on the eve of that memorable day the two brothers were together in the Seminary garden at Paris, Christian having returned from Rome for the occasion.

They had talked over many things in those precious hours, — the future of both, their beloved parents, their family affairs, their own youth and childhood. Then Just after some moments' silence suddenly asked Christian if he recalled the incident in the garden at Bretenières. It came back instantly to his mind, Christian told us, though neither had ever alluded to the strange happening before, and whether it was a real vision or an effect of the imagination, it was evidently used by Divine Providence, Father Bretenières believes, to direct the thoughts of his martyred brother to the apostolate of Eastern Asia.

Our time was passing and Father de Bretenières led us again to the chamber of Just. Opening a cabinet of precious souvenirs, he gave us each a little medal of St. Francis Xavier which had been blessed by Just on the day of his departure, showed us many souvenirs, letters, and books, — then

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opening a drawer, he took out the notes which he himself had made on his brother's life, and realizing that I had come with some purpose of making that life better known in the United States, he kindly offered me the precious manuscripts. We then arranged that I should return again to Dijon if possible; if not, that he should forward them to me at Paris. With a feeling that we should meet again, I left Father de Bretenières and we took our train for Lyons.

### III

#### A SECOND VISIT TO FATHER CHRISTIAN



WAS hurrying back to Paris from Lyons and decided to break my journey by a second visit to the brother of Just de Bretenières. This would compel me to wait at Dijon until midnight but it would give me further light on the character and home surroundings of the young martyr of Korea; so I gathered my few belongings as we approached the city, *déposé* my bag and raincoat at the station, boarded a tramcar, which I left as we came in view of St. Michael's Church, and found myself again in a few moments pulling the bell in the *Rue Vannerie*.

Father de Bretenières was at home and soon we were chatting, comfortably seated in the attractive study which the Superior of the College of St. Francis de Sales had made of his family living-room. The apartment opened directly on the courtyard, the great glass-paneled doors, then pushed back to the inner walls, forming one of the windows. Interesting souvenirs of the family were all about me. A large portrait of Just, miniatures of his parents and relatives, dainty vases and rich

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bronzes, attracted the eye and made one wish for leisure to examine them. On the windows were hung transparencies illustrating various portions of Eastern Europe and Northern Africa, for Christian de Bretenières had never lost the love for travel, fostered in earlier days by his parents. He had a most valuable collection of views prepared from his own photographs, which he used in occasional lectures on art and archaeology.

The notes on his brother's life promised on the occasion of my earlier visit had been forwarded already to Paris — eight record books filled with fine handwriting — the “family treasure,” as Father Christian called it. But there was need of photographs if Just were to be made known to Americans, and, among others, it was thought by the visitor that the surviving brother of a real martyr would be a particularly welcome subject. Unfortunately, Father Christian, though quite familiar with cameras, had never placed any value on negatives that bore his own likeness and if he had ever had one he certainly had not kept it. So out in the courtyard this worthy gentleman soon found himself with his importunate friend from the West lands, and there he had to submit to an operation the timeliness of which he had good reason to question. For the day was well advanced and snapshots decline in effect with the sun. A suggestion of the original would be better than nothing, how-

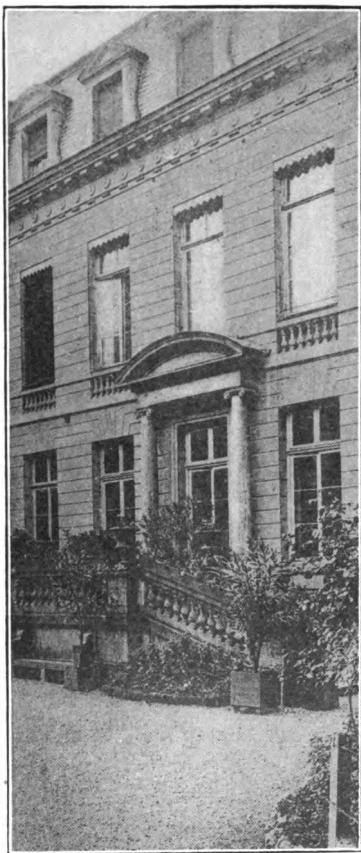


## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

ever, even if the result should be uncomplimentary to the victim.

As I folded the instrument the signal for dinner was sounded and the faculty of the College assembled. Three tables formed a hollow square in the spacious dining hall. Father de Bretenières took his place as Superior at the centre, overlooking the entire community. The meal was simple, plainly served and somewhat hurried. When grace had been said at its close, my host beckoned me to follow, and led the way through a small doorway into a private corridor which conducted us to a drawing-room of the old château. The furnishings were particularly attractive and I would have lingered, but we passed again into the study where, over coffee and cigars (somewhat rare articles in the presbyteries of France, by the way), Father Christian talked of recent happenings at Dijon, where the Church had been especially tried, of his own College and of other institutions which he had helped to found and which were now threatened with ruin.

He described in detail an incident of the preceding Sunday when, in a small parish on the outskirts of the city, the newly appointed Bishop had been publicly insulted and church services interfered with by the anti-clericals. Dijon, Father Christian admitted, was in a pretty bad condition morally. The children, deprived of Christian



*"The apartment opened directly on  
the courtyard." (Page 58)*

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## AT DIJON

teaching, had already begun to show the effects of God-less instruction and constant malicious insinuation against the Church. The sisters who had been turned out of the local hospital were replaced by lay nurses under the supervision of non-Catholic matrons who were known bigots. The streets were not safe at night and Father de Bretenières himself would never walk alone or unarmed after nine o'clock. Insults from men and women were frequent and savage highway assaults not uncommon.

In the course of our conversation we turned frequently to the subject of his brother's life. One characteristic of the young martyr which his brother felt had never been properly appreciated was an intense love of poverty which absorbed his whole nature. Just was particularly attracted and influenced by the lives of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, and before he left the Paris Seminary he had advanced further in spiritual perfection than even his closest companions realized.

When I recalled this testimony, a day or two later in Paris at the hospitable table of the *Missions Étrangères*, Father Delpech, the venerable Superior, who remembered Just de Bretenières with much affection, and who himself had confessed the Faith, said: "Ah! Bretenières carried the spirit of poverty to its very limit!" I remembered seeing at Dijon a faded hat with a patched cassock which

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Just insisted on wearing till he left France; and Father Delpach reminded me of an incident connected with Just's departure, when the young missionary, before boarding the train for Marseilles, gave away his last copper, saying to his companion, "For more than twenty years I have longed to be poor and I am so at last."

His humility was no less admirable than his love of poverty, and this characteristic of his brother's life has left a deep impression on Father Christian. Just saw much of the peasants at Bretenières and was always anxious to conceal the slightest appearance of superiority. He made himself one with them so that when he spoke to them of God they would believe in his sincerity. The same trait was noticed later when occasionally he would go out from the mission house in Paris to work among the quarry-men. On those occasions, convinced that the laborers, though poor and ignorant, were children of God, he would set before himself the task of gaining a soul. Casting aside his hat and book, rolling up his sleeves and shortening his cassock, he would seize a pick-axe, a hand-spike or a crow-bar to help some nearly exhausted toiler.

At Meudon, the summer house of the Paris Seminary, there is a retired spot on the grounds, known today as "Just's hermitage." The future martyr spent much of his free time there and more than

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once he was found before dawn on his knees, so absorbed in prayer that the rabbits, coming out of the woods, frolicked about him in perfect freedom. Today a small cross cut in the bark of the tree under whose branches he was wont to kneel marks the place, which is used by the students as a shrine.

His desire for martyrdom was also manifested to Father Christian. Just had long cherished this desire but often said that he was "not the stuff out of which martyrs are made." After his ordination it seems that diffidence on this point disappeared and quietly he looked forward with a holy joy to his own opportunity to perform this "heroic act of love," as he called martyrdom. When he was assigned to the Korean mission — the most dangerous field at that time — he could not conceal his happiness.

On the occasion of my earlier visit to Dijon I had noticed among the souvenirs of Just a rose, waxed and encased in glass; and remembering that there was in Abbé d'Hulst's *Life* an allusion to this flower, I asked for the facts. Father Christian told me that when Just was a boy, his mother sent him one day to take to the Sisters of Charity in Dijon a rose-bush for the convent garden. The little bush took root, produced leaves in regular abundance, but never flowered. Years later, when Just had already arrived in Korea, the nuns found

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on the bush one morning a solitary rose, and later it was remarked that this red flower had appeared, so far as could be learned, simultaneously with the martyr's sacrifice of blood.

As Father Christian finished relating this incident we heard a footstep on the gravel of the courtyard and a moment later a young priest appeared in the doorway, dressed in the habit of the Assumptionists. He was a trifle embarrassed, as Father Christian did not recognize him and he had come to ask shelter for the night. The Superior at once assented and was about to direct him to the procurator's room, when, looking more closely at his visitor, he recognized in him a former pupil of the College, gave him a warm welcome, and bade him be seated. The young priest had been driven into exile several months before and had found hospitality beyond the Pyrenees, in Spain; but he had had no opportunity to work and upon further application to his Superior-General had just been assigned to a field of labor in Chile, South America. He was now passing once more through France and stayed over at Dijon to say good-by to his family, whose members resided in the neighborhood. On his way from the railway station that night he had been insulted several times, but he made light of this trial.

When the guest had left us to take his rest, Father de Bretenières, noticing that the hour was growing

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late, made a search for some mementos which it occurred to him I should like to have,—photographs of the martyr, of his parents, of Christian himself when he was a student at the Sorbonne in Paris, of the two brothers on the eve of the departure—all precious souvenirs of a most profitable visit. Then, when he had selected a stout stick and put on his broad-brimmed hat, we passed together out into the courtyard, through several corridors, until by a side exit we reached the public street and started off briskly for the station.

He looked like a soldier in the garb of a priest, this man, who, I had already learned, was a power in the Church and a worthy brother of the martyr whose valiant spirit he shared. We reached the station in good time. It was big, gloomy, and quite deserted. Through the waiting-room we passed out upon the platform and trackage area, and only when he had placed me in a compartment and provided me with a pillow for the night would my worthy host take his departure. I was glad to have had the privilege of meeting this priest and to have impressed him with my interest in his brother. Truly a prophet is without honor among his own: in Dijon, Father Christian had told me, "*Just is forgotten.*"

The car-doors began to bang. An engine bumped ungraciously against our waiting coach and ran it down a siding. Darkening the compartment, I



## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

placed the pillow at one end of the long seat and stretched my coat on its length. Happy thought! For a peasant in blouse and great felt hat was just mounting. He was somewhat heavy with liquor and in a mood to fight for his rights with the conductor who, after one vigorous remonstrance, allowed him to enter the corridor. The undesirable passenger came directly to the door of my compartment, which I had been confidently assured I should have to myself. But my own rights were limited and I stepped back to make room for this king of the soil. With a leer at me he turned his eyes on the darkened prostrate form (my hat was now on the pillow above the coat), gave a grunt, and muttering, found his way to another section. I breathed a sigh of relief, feeling a trifle selfish, I must confess, as I wondered who had drawn this prize.

As we steamed slowly away from Dijon I thought of Just de Bretenières taking a similar ride to the same point of destination. At last after several turnings of the hired pillow and many a shift of my coverlet, the kindly rain-coat, I slumbered. Awakening in Paris at half-past five in the morning, I was soon on the way to the *Rue de Bac*.



!

**NEAR BOURG**  
**BLESSED PIERRE CHANEL**





## I

### THE JOURNEY TO CUET



**Y**ONS was hot and it was shortly after mid-day when I started from the heights near the great basilica of Notre Dame de Fourvière for the railway station below. I was bound for the birth-place of Pierre Chanel, martyr of Futuna in Oceania, and I was fortunate to find an empty compartment on the train marked "*Direction de Bourg.*"

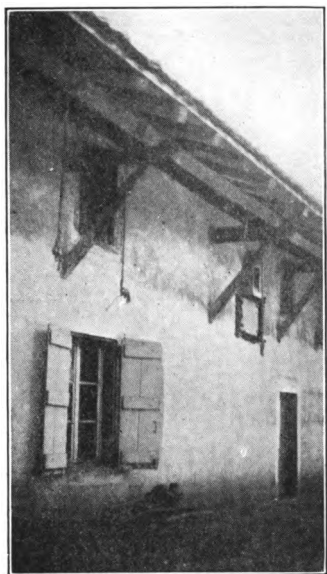
The windows were closed so that the place was stuffy, as usual. With some impatience, I confess, I put them quickly out of sight in their sockets, drew the dusty blue curtains and settled down to say some Office before the train started. It was all mine, this second-class compartment on a fourth-class train. Not that I had paid for such privacy by purchasing several tickets, but travelers on this particular line were few and preferred the third class, where they could be distracted by their companions or be kept awake by the knocking of knees.

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

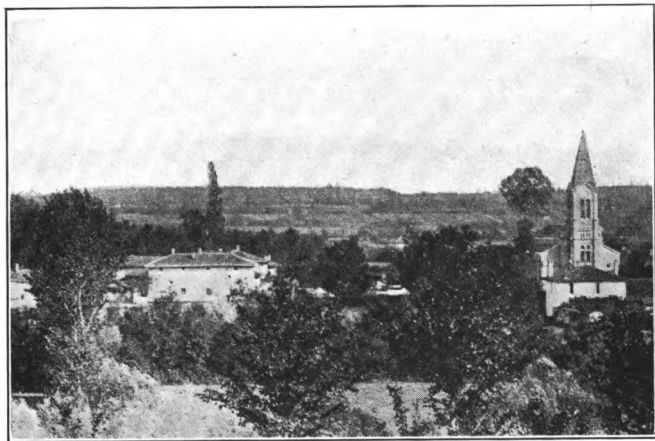
*“En voiture, Messieurs, en voiture s’il vous plaît.”* It was the signal to start and the mighty ruler of the train was unusually gracious considering the fact that he had no first-class passengers to conduct. I sighed gratefully, reflecting that the heated air would soon be fanned. We waited ten minutes longer, however, before the picayune whistle blew and the caravan for Bourg was on its way.

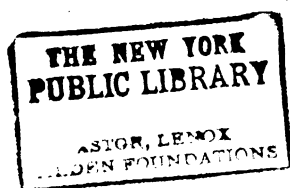
The scenery, good, bad or indifferent — whatever it might have been — was shut out. Enough light streamed through the faded curtains to allow me to read, and I might just as well have been in a mourner’s hack or, to be less irreverent, in a tunnel. But we were moving actually and in the *direction de Bourg*, — always in the direction. It was this thought that kept my heart beating, and I had need of such a stimulant for we stopped in less than six minutes. It was a real stop, too, so gentle and prolonged that the engine was evidently loath to disturb its precious burden. I wondered if we had broken down and started to inquire into the cause.

The “guard,” roused from a cat-nap which he had been taking in a rear compartment, came along the line calling out some strange name. There was nothing in sight except fields of new-mown hay, baking in the white glare of the sunlight, and the little house of the station-master. We had made



1. PIERRE CHANEL  
2. HIS BIRTHPLACE  
3. TOWN OF CRAS





## NEAR BOURG

the first scheduled *arrêt*. No passenger left the train and none mounted. Why were they waiting? My question was answered by the rattling of empty milk-cans which were being dumped out in bunches of three and four from a car near the engine.

We started again. The breeze came, hot but welcome withal. It proved that we were in motion and continued for ten minutes longer, when the movement of air gave place to the tin-can rhapsody. I learned afterwards that I had taken the worst possible train to Bourg. But there is an end to every kind of persecution, and at about four o'clock we arrived at our destination and I was soon bumping along a busy thoroughfare towards the adjacent suburb, Brou. There, free from all surrounding buildings, except the Seminary to which it stands attached, rises one of the most graceful churches in France.

We stopped at the Seminary gate and as the Superior, whom I had met in Lyons, had extended an invitation to remain over night, I confidently discharged my driver and started the usual process of breaking and entering. It is not always a simple task to break down the suspicion of an inquiring though undemonstrative *concierger*, especially in a place like Brou, which is well-away from the tourist circuit and visited, as a rule, only by art-lovers. My host was finally called, however, and a genuine welcome assured. The students had left for their



## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

summer holidays and only a few of the professors remained, so that the cloisters and house were unusually quiet. We passed through several cloisters, each representing a different period of architecture and all mellowed with age, along tortuous corridors and stairways, up to a room which had been prepared for me, but which I could never find again unaided.

In this diocesan Seminary, Pierre Chanel, the first martyr of Oceania and the first Marist Father to receive Beatification, was trained for the priesthood. I had become especially interested in this martyr through members of his Society in Boston, who hold Blessed Chanel in deep veneration and who have decorated their Church, *Notre Dame des Victoires*, on Isabella Street, with several souvenirs of their illustrious confrère.

It was not long before I found my way to the room formerly occupied by the martyr, which had been converted into a memorial chapel and contained several of his relics. It was decided that I should offer the Holy Sacrifice there on the following morning, and as there was still some time left before the evening meal we passed quietly through the house and proceeded to examine the church in detail while the day was still bright. It is not my purpose to describe this beautiful monument. I could not if I would, do justice to the wealth of detail and the beauty of outline. The decoration

## NEAR BOURG

is all in carved stone, the choir, which occupies a considerable portion of the nave, being especially fine.

My host and I were quite alone for dinner. After our visit to the church he had left me, at my request, alone, to go through the cloisters at leisure; and in that interval an incident occurred which interested the good priest not a little. From the cloisters I had passed naturally to the "castle" of the *concierge*, whom I found engaged with two duster-clad smooth-faced automobilists. These gentlemen were evidently getting the worst of it as the aforesaid official, like most of his kind, had no sympathy for a man struggling with the French language (to him so simple), and less for the wealthy stranger from afar. They were Americans, I soon discovered, and I was not unwilling to converse in my native language, especially as my tongue for two whole weeks had been tied up in all kinds of knots trying to express some passing thoughts, and my ears seemed at times during this period to have lost all sense of hearing.

So I approached these sufferers, acted as their guide, and gave them what information I possessed. They invited me to return in their automobile to Lyons but I explained that my road lay in the opposite direction and that, in any event, I had arranged to stay over night at the Seminary where I was to say Mass on the morrow in the room of

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

the young martyr, whose birthplace I was about to visit.

The two Americans looked up with evident surprise and one of them remarked that it seemed like ancient history to speak of martyrs for the faith. I told hurriedly the story of Pierre Chanel and mentioned several other martyrs whose homes I had already visited, also the *Missions Étrangères* in the heart of Paris, out of whose doors at least a hundred young men had passed to massacre or martyrdom in Eastern Asia, most of them during the nineteenth century, several in our own lifetime.

They listened with intense interest and when they had shaken hands and mounted their automobile, one of them said, "We are Americans, citizens of the United States like yourself, but what a difference there is between your opportunity and ours! My friend and I came to visit this beautiful church, but, here as everywhere in these countries of Europe, we are only curious strangers. You come and find yourself at home. You share in the life of these people, who to us are like so many closed books. I can understand," he added, "how a Catholic, especially a priest, can find his own in any country under the sun. Certainly the organization of your Church grows more and more wonderful to a man who travels."

He smiled as I told him that he had struck one note of the True Church, its Catholicity, and that

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I hoped some day he would realize the others. We shall probably never meet again. We did not even exchange names, satisfied when we learned that they were from New York and I from Boston, but I am certain that this little experience did these men some good. At least, it passed the time for me and interested my host.

The next morning after Mass offered in Pierre Chanel's room, on a little altar crowned with his statue, one of the priests drove me back to Bourg where I took a train for Montrevel, a small station on the line that runs from Bourg to Chalon-sur-Saône. Several people shared the compartment, all natives and apparently familiar with the district, but no one had ever heard of Montrevel, or else possibly my accent rendered them stupid. In any event, I had to keep a close watch for signs, as the guard who passed along the platform was as intelligible as a New York car-conductor.

I had not long to wait. As the train slowed down at a group of buildings, I spied the looked-for-name, *Montrevel*, bowed myself and small baggage out upon the platform and, as there were no empty milk-cans to follow, the train moved away silently, leaving me quite alone. The station-master, that very important individual in France — the *chef de gare*, no less — appeared to claim my ticket, and setting my coat and satchel on somebody's battered trunk, I awaited further develop-

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

ments. There were no carriage sharks here ready to pounce on an innocent victim but I was within sight of several stores and was conscious of being watched inquisitively if not with suspicion. I may remind the reader that a priest in coat and trousers is an uncommon spectacle in these remote French towns. I can hardly say whether on this occasion I felt like a freak or a discoverer.

Well, that morning I was due in Cuét, the actual birthplace of the martyr whose home I was seeking. Up to that moment, I had found nobody who could tell me its exact location and I had searched maps in vain. At Brou, however, my host had assured me that once I arrived in Montrevel I would find Cuét without much difficulty, and my host was right.

A gray-haired priest was the object of my first attack. I met him before I left the station platform and I shall never forget him though he has since gone to his reward. He was unusually small and his keen, bright eyes looked me over in sections as I gave an account of myself and solicited his services. Occasionally he blinked knowingly and a characteristic clearing of his throat indicated his growing interest. So I wished to go to Cuét, did I? Well, I could drive there. It was not very far, seven or eight kilometers would cover the distance and a carriage would be at the station in a little while.

## NEAR BOURG

I asked for the Curé of Cuet. "*Ah — !*" My new-found guide, for such he proved to be, drew a long breath, and threw again a search-light from under his heavy eyebrows. Then the face relaxed, as the brows lifted a full half-inch, and five deep wrinkles ran quickly across the width of the forehead.

"*Ah! Monsieur le Curé de Cuet, — il est bien gentil — gentil!*" He nodded his head earnestly as he repeated the phrase. Just then I sighted the "affair" that was to take me to Cuet. "*Tenez,*" my friend said, as I started to shake hands with him, "*tenez!*" He would go with me, — how far I did not know, — so we entered the conveyance by its rear door, drew the curtains against the sun and resumed our conversation, which up to this point had disclosed to me hardly more than a confidence that I was on the right road to Cuet.

The little priest faced me, took off his great hat, pulled up the sleeves of his cassock and whistled that it was hot, to which I agreed. His hair was gray, thin but curly, the kind that was once bushy and black, but that was — long ago. After several incisive questions, which were directly answered, my companion evidently concluded that I was not a robber, nor a Government spy, nor a stranger unsympathetic to his calling, but a priest from the States, off the usual line of travel. Then blinking his eyes, he began to ask for several Marist Fathers

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

who at one time or other had been stationed in Boston. As I was personally acquainted with some whom he mentioned, the thought occurred to me that he, too, was a member of the same Society; and remarking my suspicions, he soon informed me, with a wink, that such was the case. He was an exile, who had returned to visit his good friend, the Curé of Cuet.

It was a relief to feel that I should not have to prove my identity to the Curé. On the other hand, my venerable friend, *Père Dolliat*, whose card by this time was in my pocket, evidently began to reflect that he was taking some risk in introducing an American to his simple host. So he proceeded to sound me on my proposed sojourn and was somewhat taken aback when I asked if I could find an inn of some kind in the village. There was no inn, he assured me; and he felt that such a plan would not be approved by *M. le Curé*, who would very likely wish to entertain me; but he dismissed the subject — “*Tenez, tenez — we will see.*”

## II

### THE CHANEL HOMESTEAD



AFTER some moments the silence was broken by the familiar "*Voilà!*" As the old man drew aside the leather curtain, I looked out and caught my first glimpse of Cuét—with its few straggling homes and its venerable church. Old it certainly was, this church that once had echoed to the footsteps of Pierre Chanel, martyr. For seven hundred years, as I afterwards learned, it had been standing guard over the hamlet and the gentle vale below. A home of worship in a remote mission could hardly be poorer than this church with its rough-laid stones, its few simple openings, and the suggestion of a tower capped with worn tiles and surmounted by a weather-beaten cross.

In another moment, we were at the gateway of the high-walled garden that enclosed the presbytery and I found myself shaking hands with the Curé. The pastor of Cuét was a comparatively young priest with a kindly, intelligent and ascetic face, which, though it then naturally expressed surprise at so unexpected an appearance, showed no suspicion.



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Père Dolliat insisted on clearing himself of all responsibility, and, like a rapid-firing gun, he poured out a volley of words that detailed the circumstances of our meeting and the object of the attack made on Cuét by this *prêtre sauvage Américain*. There was no need of any apology, the Curé quietly assured me. This was the home-nest of Pierre Chanel, a shrine to which pilgrims came regularly from the surrounding country. And the American was so much the more welcome since he had traveled across the ocean and many miles in France to show his respect for the martyr. Besides, it was the first time in his life that the Curé of Cuét had met a native-born American priest and he was certain that none such had ever before honored the little hamlet with his presence.

But I must be tired and hot. So was Père Dolliat, who had been alternately shaking a handkerchief at his face and mopping his high forehead, during these preliminary explanations and assurances. We were ushered into the cool dining-room for a light repast, and when this was over, the Curé took me to what is called the *chambre de Monseigneur* — the Bishop's room. It was certainly a most attractive apartment, good enough for any bishop, and consequently quite acceptable to the present guest. The outlook was delightful and the interior of the apartment all that could be desired.



*"A remote mission could hardly be poorer than this." (Page 79)*



*"The actual home of the martyr — across the fields." (Page 84)*

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## NEAR BOURG

It had been my intention to stay only a few hours at Cuét, visiting the Chanel homestead, where I had been told the martyr's nephew was still living, and also, if possible, the little village of Cras near by, where Pierre had studied as a boy. When I communicated these plans to my host, he at once insisted that I should remain over night and if possible another day, so that he might give me more personal attention. He was just then preparing to receive on the morrow all the priests of the *canton* who would gather at Cuét for the monthly conference and retreat; and he was most anxious to have his visitor chant the *Grande Messe* and meet his confrères at dinner. In the meantime, the good Père Dolliat would take me, before lunch, to see the martyr's relatives and in the afternoon he would guide me to Cras.

I did not need much urging to remain under such satisfactory and interesting conditions, so while *M. le. Curé* busied himself with many duties in anticipation of the following day, my old friend, he of the curly locks, mounted with me into the waiting vehicle and we set out for the home of Pierre Chanel, martyr of Futuna. Along the well-kept road the stout horse trotted, my companion keeping up his own rapid pace with a chattering description of the several Chanel family branches and their various traits of character, together with wise remarks on the condition of the country, religious,

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social, and material. It was all interesting, for Père Dolliat was keen and observant.

We met a shepherd boy on the wayside, and the scene recalled the day when little Pierre Chanel was seated on a tuft of grass somewhere along this same road and received through a passing priest his call to the apostolate. The little saboted feet of the future martyr had often clacked along the hardened paths which we were now skirting.

Men and women toiling in the open fields shaded their eyes with their hands, to look at us across the hedges, and all saluted the old priest as they recognized him. After a drive of some three-quarters of an hour, Père Dolliat again fell into silence. This did not last long, however. The eyes were working hard, dancing directly before a small opening in the front curtain. "*Ah, voilà! la maison de Victor Chanel — regardez!*"

This was said in a tone as impressive as that of a guide in some ruined castle of Touraine. Across well-tilled fields I saw a cluster of three houses built on a slight rise of land and separated each from the other by a few hundred feet. We had still to make a turn in the road and my companion, anticipating the immediate prospect of meeting Victor, renewed his praises of the young man.

"*Un brave homme*" — a fine fellow — was Victor, the grand-nephew of the martyr, and his little wife "*très gentille, ah, si gentille!*" The

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house was very neat — “*ah, très propre!*” and the young madame was a wonderful manager. “*Ah! vous allez voir, mon Père, tout de suite* — you are going to see right off.” Victor’s chickens, too were celebrated; the whole country had heard about them: they were the finest in the *canton*. “You will see how scientifically they are reared, for Victor keeps in touch with all the latest poultry publications and Madame watches the chickens intelligently. *Ah*, the little Madame is a delicate woman, good and pious, of simple peasant stock, but refined as a born lady — you will see, you will see!”

“*Tenez!*” he called to the driver, “go into the shade there and rest your horse and yourself as well, for we are going to stay here some time.” This announcement evidently pleased Mr. *Cocher*, who was not strong and who gladly followed the old priest’s direction.

As we knocked at Victor’s front door, my guide cleared his throat of all unnecessary dust so as to properly present the stranger. *There was no one at home!* We made a circuit of the house, followed all paths that appeared to lead towards a field of grain or a patch of garden-truck, but there was no trace of a Chanel.

So we approached the only neighboring habitation, where an old woman, bent with age, informed us that Victor had gone for the day to visit his

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brother-in-law on some business. We were naturally disappointed, yet I felt relieved when I learned that the actual home of the martyr was across the fields, where another grand-nephew, not so *bien installé* as Victor, lived with his family. We turned our steps immediately in that direction, and after a short walk entered a barn-yard, lined with stacks of hay, on one of which was a little shepherd boy about ten years of age with pitchfork in hand, who ceased his labors as he sighted us.

We were about to ask if anyone was in the house, when a pair of wooden shoes echoed on the stone flooring inside and a matronly woman stood at the door. All were at home, delighted to see the genial old priest and pleased to meet the stranger, who was presented in turn to each member, quite ceremoniously, of course, by his apologist and guide.

Pierre-Marie Louis Charnay, the old man of the group, was the direct offspring of the martyr's sister. He was quite bent with rheumatism. Theophile Charnay, this old man's son, was a typical peasant, hard-working and sunbrowned, fully satisfied to live in the old homestead under conditions somewhat primitive and not too *propre*. He was married to Anne Ponciers, who greeted us and insisted on our entering the living-room of her home. This room was as deep as the house itself and its flooring rested

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on the ground. It was lighted by one window, and at this season of the year by the opened upper portion of its single door, also.

In a small apartment just off the living-room, we were shown the martyr's bed. A few souvenirs were on the wall and a portrait of the *Blessed* also adorned it, but beyond this no attempt had been made at any decoration. Though pilgrims come occasionally to Cuët, some, in fact, being expected at the church the next day, I soon realized that few visit the homestead of the martyr, whose relatives live on, quite undisturbed, in the old way. The people of Cuët, Father Dolliat assured me, are a faithful flock, the men God-fearing and the women of high Christian virtues. Seeds of socialism and irreligion with consequent discontent had found no lodgment there, where the Curé was still the best loved leader in the community.

It was evidently an enjoyable experience for these relatives of Pierre Chanel to share in the honor which an American priest was anxious to pay to their blessed kinsman. I took a few snap-shots of the house from outside and tried to include a memorial slab above the door-way. Within, I managed to get enough light for the little bed-room of the martyr. After this, Père Dolliat lined up the Charnay family — the line was a broken one, I confess — with the much-littered yard as a background. Then he stood off to contemplate his



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success and the camera did the rest, with what result the reader may judge. We said good-by to these simple people, caught a little *berger* on one of our films as we passed through the poultry-yard, and returned to arouse our driver, who by this time was sound asleep in a shady nook alongside of Victor Chanel's barn.

### III

#### THE MARTYR'S RELATIVES AND HIS BOYHOOD HOME



IN the meantime, the much-praised Mme. Victor Chanel had returned to her *ménage* and was waiting to greet us. She certainly looked all that the old priest said she was.

Modest to reverence, she stood, with a young woman, her cousin, in the shadow of her neat homestead, the summer wind gently blowing her clean white apron. Her face was plump, red-browed by occasional toil in the sun, that sweet religious type found among so many ministering angels, who, in the garb of Little Sisters of the Poor or Sisters of Charity, may be found in almost every land under God's sun, carrying the love of Christ wherever they go and making men better for having met them. Victor Chanel happened to win this "little sister" before she could be caught in the sweet toils of some religious community, and all we could say—and this was, of course, to ourselves—was that Victor seemed to have been a

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fortunate young man and deserved to be congratulated on his good taste.

The old priest felt very much at home. "*Ah!*" he sighed, with evident satisfaction, as we entered the cool, tidy living-room; and the characteristic little grunt which followed was as if he added, "*We have come to our own.*" As the young housekeeper excused herself to step into an adjoining apartment, his little eyes blinked and looked into mine for the approval which I did not withhold: *bien propre*, we both agreed.

Then, lest I should not have comprehended the relationship, my old friend rapidly sketched the matrimonial tree. Our hostess was Victor's wife. Valentine Guyon was her maiden name and she came from a good family in the *canton*. Victor's mother was dead, but his father, still living, was the actual nephew of the martyr. *Voyez-vous?*

I saw, and just at that moment the lady of the manor re-appeared with her cousin, who smiled and said nothing, but watched curiously as my guide proceeded to apologize for my appearance on the face of the earth and especially in Cuet and there. When Mme. Victor, with a somewhat fearful expression, asked if we would be refreshed, the matrimonial tree fell and my guide referred to me for a decision, expressing at the same time his own indifference. I was glad of an excuse to stay. I had been in many peasant homes of France, but

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in none so well-kept as this, which would have vied with an exhibited Holland interior. So I acquiesced and I honestly believe that the old man was not thereby disappointed.

Then came the question — always a perplexing one — of what we should have — and as I was made again the court of final appeal, I murmured that the best was none too good for an American savage. 'My old friend was amused at this thoughtful reply, the Madame smiled, her cousin giggled, and the "best" was produced. Just what it was I do not know. It might have been a temperance beverage. In any event, it was a home-made product of which the Chanels were presumably proud, and it served one good purpose, — an occasion to wish one another good health.

After this came the inevitable snap-shot. "*Ah!*" This had become the delight of my friend, who had already made himself familiar with the apparatus, an ordinary folding kodak, so that his superior knowledge now enabled him to enjoy the surprise of strangers. "*Tenez — regardez — voilà!*" These were his pet expressions, registered in turn during the operation, and when the click had been heard — "*Ah, c'est bon — là là — fini!*" and he would enjoy the discomfort of the victims, interrupted just as they were preparing to compose their faces. Then would come a stage whisper — "*Les Américains!*"

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But I had yet to inspect Victor Chanel's chicken "factory." The old priest insisted, so Madame smiled and said a few words softly to her cousin. The latter hurried away to the poultry yard, while we followed at leisure. My knowledge of things rural is limited, and for all I knew every considerable farm in New England was as well equipped with poultry-raising appliances as that of Victor Chanel. It was all new to me, however.

As we arrived at the doorway leading to this "wonderful" establishment, we saw the young girl struggling with a plump hen, which she had just captured and was placing into a numbered box. When the unwilling bird of bondage was settled in her cage *Mademoiselle* took a long section of bent metal piping which had been attached to a supply of grain, and with a quick and dexterous movement introduced the feeder, for such it was, well into the hen's throat with one hand while she released the grain with the other. When a scientifically measured quantity had descended, *Mademoiselle* shut off the supply, withdrew the piping, and unboxed the hen, who did not seem to appreciate, as she ran off, that she had been privileged, for company's sake, to enjoy an earlier meal than usual.

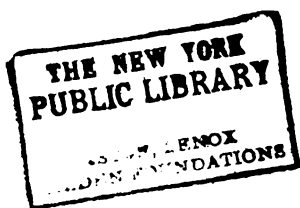
We finally roused our driver, took our leave after making an arrangement to meet Victor on the following day at the house of his brother-in-law, and



*"We made a circuit of the house." (Page 83)*



*"The Charnay family—a broken line." (Page 85)*



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drove back to Cuët, while my old friend continued his praises of Victor and of Victor's wife, her honey and butter and chickens.

The Curé was waiting for us and lunch was about ready. I was welcomed anew, as graciously as before, and at the Curé's suggestion we went into the church. It was quite as rough within as it had appeared on the outside, but the great, uneven floor-slabs were scrupulously clean, and the humble furnishings were worthy, in their neatness and poverty, of Mary's home for Jesus and Joseph in Nazareth. A reliquary had been set up in the center before the altar where Pierre Chanel, relics of whom were enclosed in this shrine, had offered the Holy Sacrifice. A large painting hung above the chancel-arch and I could depict on the canvas, under the bright noonday light, the scene of the martyr's glorification.

Five of us sat down to lunch at the little round table in the Curé's pleasant dining-room, a portrait of the martyr looking down upon us, and rows of empty chairs against the wall speaking silently of bygone feast-days in the history of the old parish, — *M. le Curé*, Père Dolliat, the stranger from America, the Curé's sister and *another* maiden lady. The last-mentioned looked not unlike an exiled nun such as one may meet occasionally now when traveling through France. This was, however, a devout laywoman, who had come, like



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myself, to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of Pierre Chanel, her favorite saint after Our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph. She was devoted also to the foreign missions and a special object of her solicitude was a certain mission in Japan, whose bishop had been born in this part of France. When the good soul learned of my own interest in her patron, who was no other than Bishop Chatron of Osaka, she was overjoyed.

Towards the middle of the afternoon, Père Dolliat gave the signal for our start to Cras, and leaving *M. le Curé* to his rapidly advancing preparations, we were soon on the high-road. Cras I recalled as the neighboring village, whose pastor had taken the boy, Pierre Chanel, into his own home and there fitted him for entrance to the preparatory seminary.

Our horse covered the distance in about an hour, when we drew up before a splendid new church that dominated the hillside with its clustered houses and commanded a most attractive view of the surrounding country. The Curé, Père Faury, came out to greet us, — a kindly man, interested to meet a stranger and enthusiastic in his desire to make my visit profitable.

As we sat in the plain dining-room for the indispensable refreshment, I noticed on the wall the inscription, "*Salle des Noces, 17 Juillet 1827.*" "What wedding was this?" I asked myself. "Some pastor's sister?" Impossible — I dismissed

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the thought, and almost immediately the Curé informed me that this was a souvenir of the banquet which followed the first Mass of Pierre Chanel, on which occasion the martyr with all the members of his family had been invited to dinner by the then Curé of Cras. It was a fitting phrase, the "Nuptial Room," for Pierre Chanel was indeed wedded to the Church which he loved and for which later he so cheerfully laid down his life.

I went upstairs, with our host, to little Pierre's room. It looked out upon the garden where the boy had spent much of his recreation nurturing plants and pretty flowers for Our Lady's shrine. The Curé was justly proud of the church, which we could see as we stood at the window and which in the natural order of events we visited and inspected at leisure. With the prospect of meeting this good priest at the retreat we started back to Cuet.

The rays of the setting sun lighted up the mountains of Beaujolais, while deep shadows began to fall on the hills of Jura towards the East. Between these two elevated ranges, vineyards and fields of grain stretched out in seemingly unending patches, which, as they caught the varying lights, were beautiful at every moment. The peasants were returning to their homes, women carrying good-sized loads of twigs, men trudging along in the vesper silence with the implements of their toil swung across their shoulders.

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We were four that night at dinner. The pilgrim had returned to her home. It was a cozy meal, simple but well served; and the conversation, as is usual at a French table, was unflagging. Perhaps it is hardly necessary to say that much of the talking was done by my venerable guide, to whom all questions were finally referred. When the last course was over, I was prepared for an invitation to sit out in the cool of the garden and enjoy a smoke-talk, but I had reckoned without my host. To signal the close, the Curé rang the bell, or rather pressed the button (for this worthy pastor is something of an electrician), but we did not rise until the servant entered and then we all knelt, turned towards the crucifix. It was the evening prayer and included several beautiful petitions and some ejaculations to the martyr of Futuna.

When this was over, we separated for the night, *M. le Curé* accompanying his guest to the "Bishop's room," which the thoughtful host had provided with *tout ce qu'il faut*, including two kinds of night-caps. With a cordial grasp of the hand, he wished me a sound sleep and a "good night."

## IV

### *A DAY WITH THE CURE OF CUET*



Y kind host had invited me to officiate at the nine-thirty Mass, which would serve the double purpose of a service for the pilgrims and the opening of the monthly retreat for the priests of the *canton*. I had accepted, although I felt that as an American, whose countrymen were quite strange to this little hamlet, I should be more of a distraction than a help to the gathered clergy.

Mass was delayed to allow a reasonable time for some aged priests to arrive, but most of them were in the sacristy by nine-forty-five. They had come, some on foot, a few by the railway, and one on his bicycle, with cassock flaps ingeniously tucked away under the handle-bar.

As the Holy Sacrifice proceeded, some simple hymns were sung by a choir of peasant girls, one of the visiting priests occupying the organ bench. These hymns alternated with psalms chanted by the clergy, and immediately after the closing prayer my old friend and guide of the previous day, Père Dolliat, S. M., mounted the pulpit and in a few

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moments had launched into a flowing torrent of spiritual thought. This was evidently noted with deep interest by all in the church, but when it reached the sacristy it was like the distant, dreamy, confused rush of a waterfall. A blessing followed the discourse and all the priests adjourned in silence to the dining-room of the presbytery, which for this day had been turned into a conference hall to allow a discussion on various points of theology, canon law, and liturgy.

At noon, lunch was served in a shed used for periodical parish festivities, and before this simple meal was begun I had an opportunity to meet the assembled priests, about eighteen in all. Most of them were middle-aged, a few, like the clerical bicyclist (who I fear, was an up-setter of local traditions) still quite young. As I saw them individually and observed them during the day, the impression left was that of a body of priests, active and full of faith, disturbed and perplexed, as a matter of course, over the miserable condition of their country, but confident that everything was for the best.

Like nearly all the priests whom I had met in various parts of France, they seemed lately to have come to some realization of the gratifying condition of Catholicity in North America, and they were keen in their inquiries concerning statistics and methods of church work in the United States.

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Some were suspicious, of course — “*ça va sans dire*,” as they themselves say, and these were inclined to believe that the Abbé Klein and other French clerics loud in their praise of the American priesthood had been looking at us through a rose-colored magnifying lens or some other deceptive medium. They were even under the impression that a tremendous wave of heresy was rising in the United States.

A lie dies slowly and the terms *Americanism* and *Heckerism*, which were forgotten in our country almost as soon as they had been uttered, were still on the circuit in France after the lapse of several years, — thanks to the deliberate falsification of certain unprincipled translators. These good men at Cuët, however, were only too ready to learn the truth and to be assured that American Catholicity is quite as vital as its apparent strength would indicate.

The priests of Belley, for this is the diocese to which Cuët belongs, were evidently not so credulous as those I had found occasionally elsewhere. Perhaps the gentle and saintly Bishop of Annecy, who was a native of this diocese, had left to his brethren some of his own sweet simplicity. In any event, they were sincere and sympathetic. Among others the Bishop of Osaka, Japan, had done much to give American Catholics a high standing in this department of France. On his return, after thirty

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years' absence in Japan, Bishop Chatron spent some weeks in this, his native province, and was enthusiastic over the Catholic Church of the United States.

Another influence exerted on these priests was the fact that most if not all of them had studied at the Junior Seminary of Meximieux, which counted among its alumni two Amercian prelates, *Monseigneur Eerlawn* and *Monseigneur Ogormon*. The visitor, quite unaware at the moment of this circumstance, was somehow slow, it must be confessed, to identify the names with the distinguished Archbishop of St. Paul and the learned Bishop of Sioux Falls. One of Archbishop Ireland's classmates was, in fact, present at the table, and others there had met Bishop O'Gorman during his course.

The signal to begin was then given. After the blessing, we all sat in silence and, as at a seminary or retreat collation, the reader started to the accompaniment of soup dishes and spoons. Ordinarily the reading would, I learned afterwards, have continued to the end of the meal, but the presence of a stranger from afar was considered justification for a *Deo gratias* which let loose eighteen silver streams of limpid French.

Then began a volley of questions, most of them bearing on the American Church, all of which were answered as perfectly as a limited knowledge of the language and other essentials would allow. The

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field was a wide one but it finally narrowed down to the matter and manner of Church support in the United States, on which subject these estimable gentlemen received a few startling facts which set them all talking among themselves and gave me a chance to catch a second wind — and some slight nourishment.

The American Church was warmly toasted and the strong hope expressed that in France similar conditions of freedom might yet be enjoyed by Catholics. After a prayer of thanksgiving, all retired immediately to the Church for Vespers and Benediction, which were in turn followed by another conference and confessions. I was glad to have met these priests at Cuet. May the martyr son of this *canton* secure for its clergy special graces in their efforts to counteract the trying times on which the Church of France has fallen!

The leave-takings were cordial though brief. The bicyclist left a little trail of dust as he sped away like an army courier; the long waiting horses jogged off with their clerical burdens (not so light on the average); the pedestrians waited for the dust to settle, and, in turn, they bade *M. le Curé*, the preacher, and the stranger *au revoir*; and last but not least, the pastor of Cras expressed his hope that Pierre Chanel, the Blessed, would one day bring us all together again.

We watched the last cassock as it brushed against

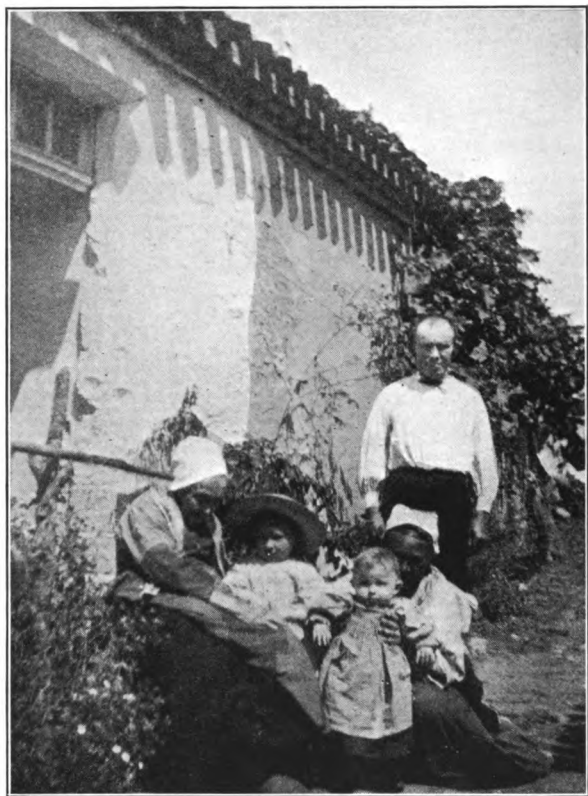


## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

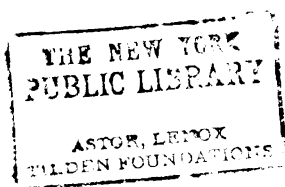
the hedge at the presbytery corner, and Père Dolliat, as at the close of a mighty effort, wiped his perspiring brow and sighed — “*Ah! fatigué — whew!*” And the poor little Curé, — he certainly looked tired. His thin, pale face was slightly flushed with the final excitement, and the day’s responsibilities had evidently told on his strength, but it was over now and he seemed relieved. There were left on his hands the two with whom he had started, but perhaps, I argued, the stranger would serve a useful purpose, as target for Père Dolliat’s anecdotes and observations on divers subjects and thus allow our kindly host needed relaxation.

I begged the Curé to rest a while, but he would not listen. Victor Chanel, the martyr’s grand-nephew, had arranged to meet us down the road at the house of Mme. Victor’s brother-in-law and *M. le Curé* would take me there. It would do him much good, he assured me; so towards six o’clock we started, with a promise to Père Dolliat that we should return for dinner at seven, during which time I presumed that the active little man would be talking to himself for lack of any other audience.

Passing around the inn — for it seems that a stray pilgrim *can* be accommodated at Cuet — the pastor and his visitor were soon on the highway. My companion was saluted respectfully by all whom we met, and with infinite gentleness he spoke



*"There were not a great many houses on the road, but we entered all."*  
(Page 101)



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his word of greeting to each. There were not a great many houses on the road but we entered all, as the Curé was organizing a Lourdes pilgrimage and was most anxious that Cuét should be well represented. A special car and very low railroad rates might be provided if they could only secure the required number. Would the good mother go? "No." The journey would cost only one hundred francs (\$20.00) and think of the privilege of seeing the best-loved shrine in all France. And who knew? Perhaps the long-continued asthmatic attacks would stop. In any event, the money would be well-spent on this pilgrimage of faith.

But it was for *Annette*, the little one, that the old lady was solicitous. She herself would not have many years to suffer, but *Annette* was young and delicate. Perhaps the Holy Virgin would make *Annette* strong, urged the Curé — "*N'est-ce-pas, Père?*" He had turned to me for assurance and for the first time the household realized that the stranger was a priest. The discovery threatened to be a final blow to the Curé's plea but he hastened to explain the presence of the "cassockless wonder" and in the end I flatter myself that the exhibition of this curiosity won the day. It is possible that these good people, then and there, decided to go to Lourdes and pray for my conversion to the cassock. At all events, in every instance the Curé received the encouragement which he sought.

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About a mile away from the Church we came to our rendezvous, the dwelling of Mme. Victor Chanel's brother-in-law, another well-appointed home with a large farm attached. Madame herself was at the door to greet us and she resembled closely the *petite* marvel to whom Père Dolliat had presented me on the previous day. Two bicycles leaned against the doorway, suggesting that the young men whom we sought were not far away; and in fact we had hardly been seated when their owners appeared and I had the pleasure of meeting Victor, the ideal *brave homme*, grandnephew of the Blessed Pierre Chanel and special friend of Père Dolliat, S. M.

Let me hasten to assure the reader that Père Dolliat's judgment seemed well founded in his estimate of Victor Chanel. Tall, well-built and manly, with a face kindly and honest, Victor came forward to greet us. He had the ease of a gentleman and a woman's modesty. One felt that this young man of thirty had within him elements of success, and though conscious of his ability, he was yet without the slightest trace of boastfulness. He had hurried in from the fields in peasant attire and at once manifested a keen interest, not only in my purpose respecting his blessed kinsman, but in the fact that I was an American. He showed unusual familiarity with events and conditions in the United States and sighed as we made the inevitable com-

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parison between the present prospects of the Church in both countries. Poor fellow! I thought, perhaps he foresees that before the climax is reached, he too, like his martyred kinsman, may be called upon to suffer and even to die for the Faith, which to him, as to many of his countrymen, is still dearer than life itself.

The day was too far advanced for a successful photograph and the faithful camera failed to carry away a likeness of Victor Chanel — the more's the pity, since Victor's features were supposed to resemble not a little those of the Blessed Pierre.

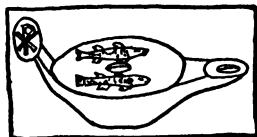
At an early hour the next morning I left Cuet. My gentle host was warm in his expressions of regret, and his invitation to return was as genuine as it was acceptable. The older priest stood at one side and nodded approvingly as if to remind both of us that it was he who had brought about this union of hearts. We all walked together towards the railway station, along the road which Pierre Chanel had traveled, when, without daring to say good-bye, he left his parents, and took up his Way of the Cross to Futuna, where he was destined after a few short months to win the martyr's crown.

At Montrevel, I left my companions and was glad to find a compartment unoccupied, where I could reflect at leisure on the gratifying experience which had been mine. I can still see the two priests, — the gentle Curé bowing slightly and Père Dolliat,

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

with his curly locks and snapping eyes, drawing the attention of all the passengers as he waved his big hat with an important gesture, that would have started the train even if the conductor had not blown his miserable penny whistle. Since then, Père Dolliat has taken his flight to Heaven. May sweet Jesus have mercy on the faithful soul of this zealous priest who knew and served men well because he loved God generously!

I left the train at Amberieux and changed cars for Meximieux, arriving at the *petite Séminaire* just before noon. While waiting in the parlor for the Superior, I remarked two large paintings, one of Pierre Chanel, who had studied here, the other of a much-loved modern saint whose voice had echoed occasionally in these halls, the Blessed *Curé d'Ars*. It was good to feel that martyrs and saints belong even to our day.



**ASSAIS AND ST. LOUP**  
**BLESSED THÉOPHANE VÉNARD**







## I

### THE MARTYR'S BROTHER



T was a chance question that led me to the home of Théophane Vénard. I had made my second pilgrimage to the *Rue du Bac* in Paris, and one day, while at the rear of the chapel, I noticed on the left wall an engraved slab commemorating this young martyr whose decapitated body rests in the crypt below.

At lunch in the mission-house that day, I asked if any of Théophane Vénard's relatives still survived him. The Superior, Father Delpech, a former classmate of the martyr, informed me that Eusebius, to whom many of Théophane's letters were addressed, was a priest attached to the diocese of Poitiers as Curé of Assais. Mélanie, he added, had died a nun at Amiens, and about Henry he knew nothing.

Eusebius still alive! The little Eusebius so frequently mentioned in the charming letters of this young martyr! Then and there I made up my mind to visit Assais and to greet Eusebius Vénard,

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if only for a moment. Maps and time-tables were searched that evening, and after some difficulty the village was located and the nearest railway station found to be Airvault, on the direct line between Paris and Bordeaux.

A message was then sent to warn good Father Eusebius of the trouble ahead of him; and the next afternoon, when the Paris train, after a ride of five hours, stopped at Airvault, I saw on the platform a cassocked individual with a genial face, rosy and round, crowned with long, gray hair which swept back almost to his shoulders from under the characteristic broad-brimmed hat of the French clergy. It was "little Eusebius," and the good man had driven eight kilometers in the hot sun to meet this stranger.

Though I was dressed quite properly as an American priest, my short coat deceived the good Curé, and a white straw hat threw into the shade whatever value might have been attached in his eyes to my Roman collar. The old gentleman glanced away immediately in search of some one else, but the question of identity was soon settled to his satisfaction.

After mutual greetings we entered the cool parlor of the village inn, which is conducted by a good parishioner; and, while refreshments were being served, the women of the house enjoyed their first view of an American priest, who evidently im-

## ASSAIS AND ST. LOUP

pressed them as a freak, if not as an Indian. Our driver had joined us,—a splendid type of the prosperous young French farmer. His horse was ready, and mounting the high two-wheeled cart to which the animal was attached we set out on a five-mile drive.

Leaving the village, we skirted the banks of a picturesque river, and drove under a vista of splendid trees, out upon a slightly elevated plain, from which we could count no fewer than seven churches. As we neared Assais, the toilers in the field saluted their Curé and stared hard at the new-comer.

*Voilà!* A turn in the road brought us to the church, a dear old building in stone and cement, the entrance to which seemed lost in mystery. We alighted, passed under the arched gateway of a high wall, and in another moment I was standing in the home of Eusebius Vénard—with Henry, the aged brother, still alive to salute the martyr's client, and Madame the housekeeper smiling quizzically, as she eyed the stranger from head to foot. The sight of a real priest in citizen's clothing was evidently quite distracting, not to say disedifying, to these good people, and the old lady was certainly looking at me with suspicion.

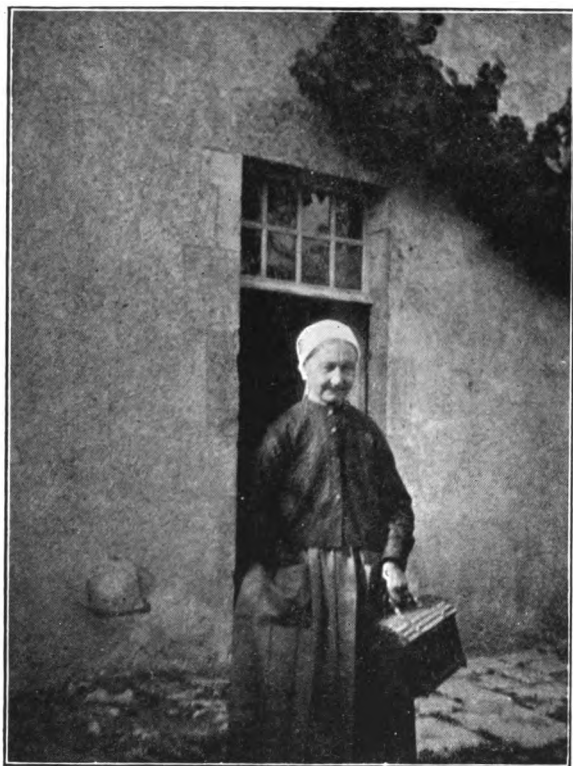
As by this time I had promised Father Eusebius to remain several days, I decided to relieve the situation at once, if possible, so I asked for a cas-

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

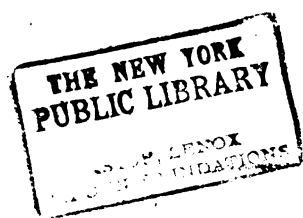
sock. Fortunately the Curé was supplied with two, — one slightly green, the other, which he was wearing in honor of the occasion, a proper black *drap d'été*. The black one went to the visitor, who, to the delight of the old housekeeper and M. Henry, appeared at the table in cassock, cincture and "bib," — everything, in fact, except a tonsured head, long stockings and buckle shoes.

The dining room, which was also used as living room and study, was spacious if not luxurious, and the little centre-table, covered with oilcloth, looked hardly large enough for three; but we sat in cosily, — Eusebius, Henry and their guest, while Henry's dog, Kebis, took his place in an expectant attitude. The old lady's face was wreathed in smiles, which would certainly have been more pronounced were they not restrained by the immaculate bonnet-strings tied tightly under her chin and falling in two stiff straight lines that swayed as she passed from the dining-room to her bellows in the kitchen.

But alas for her! When the sun shines rain may not be far off. In her excitement she had forgotten the butter, — an unusual article of diet in the Curé's household; she had omitted to set a spoon at the stranger's place; then — a positively unpardonable offence — *she had taken away the oil before the Curé finished dressing the salad!* The sun suddenly disappeared and the clouds gathered, but all that I caught in the rumblings of the storm



*"Smiling quizzically as she eyed the stranger." (Page 109)*



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were the words, "You've lost your head since this American came to the house!" Then there was a calm, the Curé smiled, Henry gave some bread to Kebis, and the old lady came in with a look of triumph and — the coffee.

The meal was over, a pronounced success in spite of the flurry, and, as we passed into the garden, the old *bonne* took another sly look through the kitchen window and retired with a new smile as she received a profound bow from the visitor. Later, while the good Curé was in conference with one of his parishioners, she stole out to tell me that the pastor was a very good priest but "a little fussy" at times.

As the white cap disappeared I turned into the garden path and was soon joined by Father Eusebius. He spoke of America, of his own country, and of the Paris Seminary, but every few moments his mind would go back to his martyred brother and I soon discovered that the great reunion with this venerable kinsman was the underlying current of all his thoughts.

The village was quiet as the tomb when my host led the way to the guest-chamber. It was a large room on the second floor, looking out across the courtyard to the church. The flooring, of soft wood, was relieved by a solitary little rug alongside the high bed, which was draped in its corner as if for a king. A table, three chairs, a wash-



## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

stand, and a huge cabinet completed the furniture. Father Eusebius looked carefully about to see that everything was in its place, and for a moment I feared for the housekeeper, but the inspection revealed faultless order. Even the white night-cap was resting on the pillow. I may add that its folds were not disturbed during my visit.

Satisfied that everything had been prepared, Father Eusebius turned towards the cabinet—a family heirloom—and opened it with a key which he carried in the pocket of his *soutane*. At his request I approached, and, one by one, he took from their places the treasures that were more to him than life itself,—souvenirs of his martyred brother: the chalice from which Théophane had drained his Master's Blood, that he might enrich his own and thereby offer a fitting libation; books of devotion which had nourished his soul in the weariness of exile; some locks of his precious hair; a few tiny bones from his dear body; and packages of letters written in the martyr's fine, delicate hand.

The door of the cabinet was reverently closed, the lock clicked, and the precious key went back to its place in the Curé's pocket. Then before leaving, Eusebius pointed to three simple frames hanging on the walls, telling me that they contained the original letters written from the cage in Tongking, and wishing me a good night's rest he

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left me to my own reflections. The wooden-soled shoes echoed along the bare floors of the corridor and down the winding stair-case; a door slammed below me; a few moments later I heard the shutter close, and all was still. I took my candle and held it up to the framed letters. One was written, evidently with charcoal, in coarse characters on white cloth; the others were traced lightly on a reddish Chinese paper.

The last to which I turned was addressed to Eusebius himself and the words came home to me as if the very letters were streaming with living blood:

### MY MUCH-BELOVED ONE:

If I did not write you a few lines for your very own self, you would be jealous, and, I admit, with reason. You deserve it, too, for your many lengthy and interesting letters to me. It is very long since I have heard from you now; and perhaps you are already a priest? and — who knows, perhaps a missionary? However that may be, by the time you receive this letter, your brother will be no longer in this bad world “*totus in maligno positus*.” He will have left it for a better one, where you must strive to join him some day. Your brother’s head will have fallen and every drop of his blood will have been poured out for God. He will have died a martyr! That was the dream of my youth! When, as a little man, nine years old, I used to take my pet goat to browse on the slopes of Bel-Air, I loved to devour the life and death of the venerable Charles Cornay, and say to myself, “And I, too, will go to Tongking. And I, too,

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will be a martyr! " Oh, admirable thread of Divine Providence, which has guided me through the labyrinth of this life to the very mission of Tongking and to martyrdom! Bless and praise our good and merciful God with me, dearest Eusebius, who has taken such care of His miserable little servant. "Attraxit me, miserans mei! " . . . And you, dearest little brother, still so young in years, you will remain long after me fighting among the waves of this troublesome world. Guide your ship well. Let prudence take the helm; humility the rudder; God be your compass, Mary your anchor of hope. And then, in spite of the disgust and bitterness which, like a howling sea, will sometimes overwhelm you, never be cast down. Have confidence in God, and, like Noah's ark, swim always above the waters. . . . My lamp gives no more light. Good-by, my Eusebius, until the day when you come to rejoin me in Heaven.

Your most affectionate brother,

J. T. VÉNARD, Miss. Apost.

## II

### *A DAY AT ASSAIS*



IN the Curé's garden at Assais there was a little family of turtle-doves. I learned of their existence at four o'clock on the morning after my arrival. Their cooing was low and sweet, but not soothing enough to let me forget the world again, so I lay awake, and, recalling the events of the preceding day, tried to realize my surroundings as the guest of a martyr's brother. Towards six o'clock I heard the firm step of Father Eusebius as he came slowly up the winding stairs and with rapid movement approached the door of my chamber, which received a knock more vigorous than was necessary. A few minutes later the Angelus rang, and in another quarter of an hour I found my way into the church, saluting, as I passed, my early serenaders in their cage.

The old stone church was marked with at least two centuries of use, but it was comfortable and in fairly good repair. At a new marble altar I found the pastor saying Mass, assisted by three seminarians who were evidently home for the

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

summer holidays. Some women were present, and the front pew was occupied by the *bonne*, who had a distraction as I entered and probably a few more when, a little later, the American priest, actually in vestments, began prayers at the foot of the altar.

In the sacristy after Mass I met the three students. They were brothers, Basil, Valentine, and Alfred Huctin, — interesting types of the bright young French clerics who, with awakened opportunities, will yet win back to their afflicted Church the fair name which today is overshadowed.

As I was preparing to leave the vestry, an elderly woman entered and courtesied. She knelt to receive a blessing and, rising, begged a prayer for her boys, who were none other than the three seminarians, and for her girl, a nun in India. I gladly promised to visit the home of this family if I could secure the permission of my host, whom the young men and their mother evidently held in reverential fear; and crossing the courtyard I found Eusebius and Henry, with Kebis, the dog, waiting for breakfast, not to speak of the *bonne*, who had prepared the *petit déjeuner* and was considerably worried to know if the American would take butter so early in the day.

About ten o'clock, when the breviaries had been laid aside and the Curé's flower and vegetable beds

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inspected, Henry left us to get the dinner supplies, while Eusebius beckoned me into the living-room and placed a chair beside his own at the rough-board table, to which he had brought a pile of manuscripts from the mysterious recesses of an adjoining bedroom. Then, fixing a brown paper cigarette into a silver-mounted holder — a souvenir of Lourdes and decorated with Our Lady's monogram, at that — the old gentleman adjusted a pair of steel-bowed spectacles, put on a skull cap of rusty black oiled paper, which served to protect his tonsure from the flies, gave a little characteristic grunt, and settled down to what I soon discovered was his one great recreation — the rehearsal of his brother's beautiful life.

The manuscript before us was in two piles, neatly arranged. In one were the original letters written by Théophane Vénard from the Colleges of Doué and Montmorillon, from the Seminary in Poitiers, from the *Rue du Bac* in Paris, and from Tongking up to the time of his captivity. They were all in the same fine, delicate hand, and were chronologically arranged with copious marginal references faithfully made by Father Eusebius, who had prepared the long process by which his brother was declared Venerable — the first step towards canonization.

The other manuscript contained the pages of a drama on which the Curé was then engaged, and

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

which has since been enacted in the garden of the presbytery by the villagers of Assais. Its title was:

### CAPTIVITY AND MARTYRDOM OF THE VENERABLE THÉOPHANE

It was to this drama that Eusebius was most anxious to direct my thoughts, and he began by announcing the characters:

Théophane, the martyr; the grand mandarin, viceroy of Hanoi; the mandarins of the criminal court and of tributes; the catechists; the uncle of the viceroy; Paul, a Christian child; the soldiers, etc.

The reading of the 'prologue, which followed, was a dignified summary, after which my host outlined the various acts: the trial, "*absolutely historical and scrupulously reproduced*," as he observed; the young prisoner of Christ, "*singing in his cage, like a bird in the tree*"; the solicitude of the soldiers; the friendship of the mandarin's uncle; the vain efforts on the part of Théophane's admirers to secure his freedom by compromise; the last Communion; the sentence of death; the procession to martyrdom, with the triumphant apotheosis.

The brother's voice trembled often, and the tears, which he tried to conceal, glistened from time to time in the kindly eyes. Certain passages, how-

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ever, evidently stirred his pride, as when to the grand mandarin's question — "You do not fear death?" Théophane answered: "Grand Mandarin, I do *not* fear death. Our European merchants come here to seek your goods which they are pleased to carry to their countrymen who buy them for their weight in gold: *but I — I disdain the treasures of this world; I wish to save souls to offer them to my God, and I shall willingly pay for them with my life. I am not guilty of any crime which deserves death; but if Annam kills me, I will gladly shed my blood for Annam.*"

We had come to the lonely vigil in the cage, when Théophane was made to read aloud some of the precious sentences which he wrote on that occasion to his respected and beloved father:

I have not had to endure torture like many of my friends. A slight sabre-stroke will separate my head like the spring flower which the gardener cuts for his pleasure. We are all flowers planted on this earth, which God gathers in his own time, one a little earlier and one a little later. One is as the purpled rose, another as the virgin lily, another the humble violet.

I knew those words almost by heart, but the beauty was not lost in the repetition, and to the brother, as to myself, they seemed as living as if they had just been received from the Far East. Eusebius paused, but recovering himself, finished:



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I wish you, my dear father, a long, peaceful and saintly old age. Bear sweetly the crosses of this life, following the footsteps of Jesus, even to the Calvary of a happy death. Father and son will meet again in Paradise. I, poor little moth, I shall go first. Farewell!

Again, in the scene which led up to the last Communion, the brother entered deeply into its spirit as he slowly read the words which he felt that Théophane had uttered on that sublime occasion:

How slowly the sun rises! When wilt thou come, thou Dawn of my Feast Day, Dawn that shall have no evening for the martyr? Sun of Annam, haste to shine upon the little hills of Hanoi! With thee will return the Feast of Mary, my Mother; with thee will come again my humiliations and my triumphs. As thou hast already brought to me the minister of Divine pardon, so wilt thou guide to me in safety the child who is to bring the sacred Body of Jesus. Hasten, beautiful Sun! I would hail once more thy joyous return! Tomorrow, perhaps, my eyelids will be closed in death, and my eyes will never again behold thy golden rays in the skies of Annam. O Annam, with what joy will I shed my blood to render thy plains fruitful and to make the Faith of my God flourish here!

At noon we had interrupted the reading for lunch and the customary hour of rest. The day was well advanced when we reached the last act, the details of the execution as narrated by observers

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and the conversion of the viceroy's uncle to the martyr's faith.

The toilers were returning from the fields. I could hear their voices and the clacking of their sabots on the pavements beyond the high wall that separated the Curé's garden from the street. There was considerable movement, too, in the kitchen, and the *bonne* had been making several stealthy visits to a china-closet at my left. The old priest at last became conscious of her presence, and hastened to the apotheosis, which we reached as the Angelus was striking. We knelt together, and then, slowly gathering his treasures, Eusebius carried them back to their hiding place while I went out to a shaded walk in the garden for Vespers and Compline.

As I finished I saw the *bonne* standing at the door with a complacent smile, and I knew that dinner was ready.

Henry had been successful; he had caught a pigeon in the church tower, he had gathered artichokes, lettuce, and berries from the garden; and these, with good bread from the village and cheese from St. Loup (the martyr's birth-place), all prepared by an "experienced French cook," should certainly satisfy an American Indian — and they did.

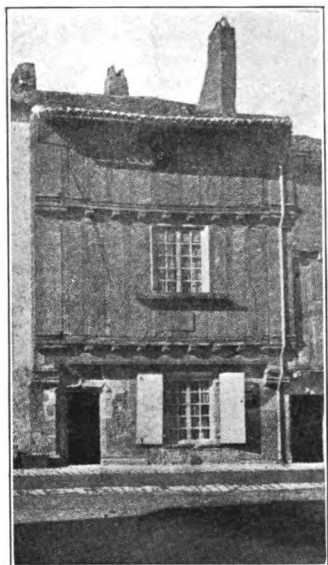
### III

#### THE HOME AT ST. LOUP

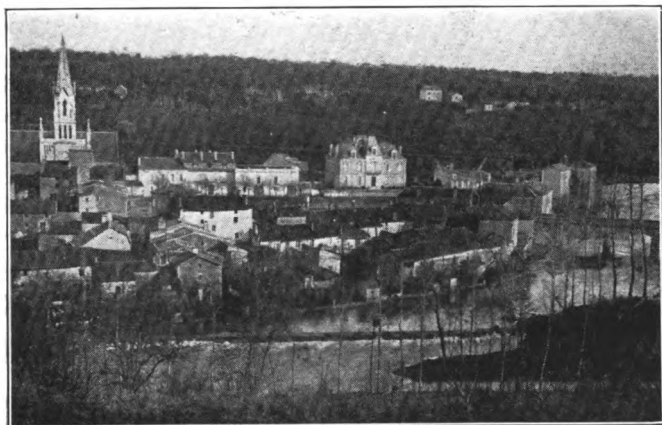


It was settled that we should go to St. Loup on Thursday to visit the Vénard home. The three young seminarian brothers could be spared from the farm that day,—their father's horse likewise, and horses, you know, are scarce among the country curés in France. The *bonne* too, good servant that she was, could rest after her exhausting efforts and new experiences; and the manuscripts in the desk of dear Father Eusebius would not be hurt if left to gather a few specks of dust.

So not long after the appointed hour I heard the rumble of wheels followed by the click of the gate-latch, and going down into the garden I found Valentine and Alfred ready for the excursion and waiting for the lord of the parish to give a signal for departure. Father Eusebius, who was finishing *Little Hours* on his favorite path, soon appeared in the faded cassock—his guest still clung to the black one—fresh cincture, pressed bib with bead-edges, and a very respectable hat. With a



1. THÉOPHANE VÉNARD
2. HIS BIRTHPLACE
3. ST. LOUP-ON-THOUE





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few parting instructions to the *bonne*, and some more to his brother Henry, "*Allons!*" he almost shouted, and in a trice we were clambering into a springless, un-named vehicle of questionable age, which no one but a bloused peasant or some misguided visitor would occupy without an accident insurance policy — or even with one.

Basil had the reins, and when all five were settled, each more or less comfortably according to the number in the seat beside him, our theologian-driver gave a peculiar chirp followed by a low whistle and the animal moved on in stately triumph. During several exciting moments, with Kebis barking and the Curé getting settled, we were kept busy returning the salutations of the villagers, who seemed to be under the impression that the American was going for good. No such luck was in store for them.

It did not take long to get away from the clustered homes of Assais, out into the houseless plains of the *campagne*, over which the good horse, with his pointed collar dancing above a well-combed mane, jogged along leisurely enough, headed towards St. Loup. The distance was not long; an automobile would have covered it in fifteen minutes — barring accidents — but modern means of locomotion do not trouble this section of France. The sun was fairly high when we reached the summit of a long graded road and came in full view

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of St. Loup, nestling in a gentle vale below us, the church at its very heart, with graceful spire and sun-lit cross pointing proudly to the eternal home of the young martyr whose birth-chamber it shadowed.

*St. Loup-sur-Thouet!* — on the Thouet. The silver stream was running through the town below us, “sweet and clear — our Thouet,” as Théophane had written from Paris to Eusebius. A little *berger*, driving a few sheep, passed us in the road, and as I thought of Théophane I was tempted to photograph the boy, but Eusebius was already impatient to hitch the horse and settle down to a quiet visit; so the young shepherd lost my sympathy, which he never suspected, and my gift, which perhaps would have hurt more than helped him. Every step was interesting now as we passed the homes of the townspeople, over the narrow streets which time and time again had echoed the martyr’s footsteps.

Leaving the imposing castle on our right, we turned into a street lined with houses, and just as we reached the church, which was set back a few rods from the thoroughfare, Father Eusebius gave the familiar “*Voilà!*” following it with the words, “*La maison paternelle,*” and turning, I noticed, directly opposite the church, a plastered house, relieved by timber, with overhanging eaves and high-built chimney, one home among several in a

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row, distinguished by a simple slab, nailed over the solitary window of the second floor, and bearing the inscription:

**HERE WAS BORN**

**JEAN T. VÉNARD**

**Nov. 21, 1829**

**Martyred in Tongking, Feb. 2, 1861.**

I was anxious to enter at once, but *M. le Curé* of St. Loup must first be visited. He was expecting Father Eusebius and the stranger; and the young seminarians were anxiously awaited by their brother who resided with his family in the town. The formalities of the occasion were scrupulously observed — salutations from *M. le Curé* of St. Loup to all, and a visit to the church with proper praise for its fine appearance and latest improvements. Then we crossed the street to the *maison paternelle*.

The house still belonged to the Vénard family, which meant that Eusebius was its proprietor. From the kind reception we received at the hands of the present tenant I concluded that my host was an easy "landlord," and the lack of modern improvements, with the accumulation of ancient inconveniences, made me suspect that the occupant was hardly a fussy tenant. Under the stone lintel we passed, through the dark passage-way, out into



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the garden where Théophane and Mélanie had spent long, happy hours nursing the tender plants which blossomed for Our Lord's tabernacle and Our Lady's shrine. As he stood by the well, Eusebius pointed here and there to special bushes which Théophane had set out in his vacation days, and to others which Mélanie had nurtured. Here, while little Eusebius played alone, the elder brother and sister had often conversed about their vocations, and I thought of Mélanie, when Théophane had left her, stealing out here in the shade of the evening to read and re-read her brother's precious letters, full of love and hope, of fervor and confidence.

Oh, if you did but know how my poor head works when I am all alone, and can't sleep for thinking! How happy I should be in a quiet country parish with my Mélanie! I would guide the good people to try and save their souls, and you would have care of the church; and together we would labor for God, and talk of Him and His Mother, and of all those we have loved and lost. But one thought troubles me in the midst of these castles in the air. All this is very good and very pleasant certainly; but when it comes to the point, what is the priesthood? Is it not the entire detachment from all worldly goods—a complete abandonment of all temporal interests? To be a priest, one should be a saint. To guide others, one must first learn to guide oneself. Then should not the life of a good priest be one of continual sacrifice, self-immolation, and mortification of all kinds? How in the world should I ever have the cour-

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age to embrace such a life, — I, who am so little advanced in the paths of virtue, or of penance?

These are my thoughts, darling sister, and they always come back to the same.

We returned into the house. It seemed dark and poorly lighted, perhaps because Mélanie and Théophane were no longer there, — Mélanie, whom Théophane seemed so often to see, “going lightly about the house, singing softly as was her wont, doing things for her father and the children and everybody.” I glanced into the living room, at the fire-side, where, in the course of the trying fortnight preceding Théophane’s departure, the family was wont to gather, when there would often be a dead silence, the father content with pressing his son’s hand, not trusting himself to speak. Eusebius was a chubby little fellow then, but old enough to realize the sacredness of those hours and he recalled vividly how Théophane would cheer them all and excite his boyish imagination with droll stories or with accounts of the countries which he was soon to visit.

Here Mélanie had lingered each night after the others to get the last kiss, the last word, and the firm pressure of the hand that silently told the deep affection of her brother’s heart. Here on the memorable eve of departure, when the tired father and Henry and little Eusebius had gone to bed, Théophane and Mélanie kept the long vigil until

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

day broke after a night all too short for the interchange of thought and holy promises between these children of Christ; and both crossed the street to lay their resolutions at the tabernacle door, and to welcome into their souls Him in Whom they are united forever. Ten years later Théophane found sweet consolation in the remembrance of that vigil. From Tongking he wrote:

It was with you, dearest Mélanie, that I passed the solemn night which was our last meeting on earth and which we spent in a conversation so full of intimate thoughts and feelings of sympathy and holy hope that it reminded me of the farewell of St. Benedict and St. Scholastica. It is only fair that in the last hour your brother should think of you and send you a few final words of love and never-dying remembrance.

In the room in which I was then standing the last dinner had been taken, after which the family, together with their pastor, recited the rosary, then read a chapter from the "Imitation," and said the evening prayers, which Théophane alone had the courage to lead. As he finished, Eusebius tells us, he threw himself at his father's feet to receive his blessing, and knelt for the final blessing of the beloved Curé. Henry had gone out to see if the carriage was ready; Eusebius, sobbing as if his little heart would break, threw himself into his brother's arms, reluctant to lose his hold. Mélanie, kissing him and crying, "Only once more!" fell back al-

most fainting, and the father in silent grief leaned on the old priest for support. With a last embrace Théophane saluted his half-unconscious sister and rushed to the carriage. Henry alone was witness to what followed when the tension of grief was loosed. Théophane, burying his face in his hands, cried bitterly and uncontrollably to relieve the poor heart which had borne the awful ordeal so bravely.

These memories were enough. Father Eusebius let me look for a moment into the birth-chamber, which had also witnessed the early death of their good mother. We passed out again into the street, over to the presbytery where the Curé was ready to greet us with a kindly welcome to his hospitable board.

The good parishioners of St. Loup, the diocesan news, the coming retreat at Poitiers, the Chamber of Deputies, the outlook for the persecuted Church, American customs and Catholic progress in the United States,—all these and several other subjects made a lively accompaniment to the substantial repast provided by our host, in the course of which *M. le Curé* of Assais did not fail to quietly call the attention of *M. le Curé* of St. Loup to the manner in which they take bread with butter in America. And the stranger was not less amused when, from time to time, his host's right arm found its way into a huge, deep basket conveniently placed at his side, and brought out a loaf of bread almost the width of the table.

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

At the close we passed into the shade of the garden and in a few moments were joined by our companions who, fresh from their own dinner, were waiting to escort us to Bel-Air, the scene of Théophraste's call to the apostolate and to martyrdom.

#### IV

#### *THE PILGRIMAGE TO BEL-AIR*



SETTING out from the Curé's garden at St. Loup, we took the street to the left and crossed the substantial bridge which spans the Thouet only a few rods away. We had not gone far when a bend in the road, down a short incline, brought us in full view of the silent and beautiful stream, which at this point runs under a perfect vista of trees. It was early in the afternoon and the sun was hot. The shaded nook was so grateful that we stood for some moments leaning on the bridge-rail, watching the waters as they flowed swiftly by these banks, from which, doubtless, many a time the future martyr had, with his companions, plunged into the current.

We resumed our walk, which soon led us to a line of peasants' homes, and turning into the court-yard of one, we were greeted by a bright little mademoiselle about eight years old, who, in danger of being spoiled by her three seminarian uncles, seemed anxious to accompany them on our pilgrimage to Bel-Air. So with a little lady's white

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

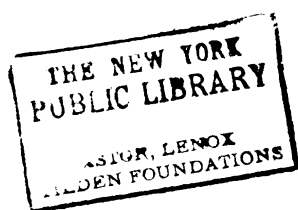
dress to relieve the five black cassocks, we continued our walk; and before long I noticed on the hill-top which we were approaching the stone apse of the memorial chapel, which Eusebius, as I had already been informed, had started many years ago to build.

Bel-Air is on a rise of land between the Thouet and Cebren rivers and commands a picturesque view of the surrounding country. Several acres belonged to the elder Vénard, who had been a school-master in the town and later a justice of the peace. The property still remained in the hands of Eusebius and his brother Henry, the only surviving heirs. As we arrived, Eusebius let down the bars, and we took a path, overgrown with weeds, that led to the chapel site. A few yards in the rear, and commanding the valley, was a plain stone shaft with commemorative inscriptions on its several sides. Here Théophane Vénard, at only nine years of age, was one day reading aloud to some of his little companions the life of Charles Cornay, whose home was not far from St. Loup and who had been recently martyred in Tongking. The death of this young priest, a former student of the *Missions Étrangères* in Paris, was magnificent, and the letters which he wrote to his parents on the eve of his martyrdom are typical of that sublime heroism which has always characterized the fearless apostles of Jesus Christ.



**THE MARTYRDOM OF FATHER CHARLES CORNAY**  
*Painted by a Tongkingese artist. (See page 132)*





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Théophane was moved to tears as he read those letters, and at the end he cried out: "And I too, will go to Tongking; and I too, will be a martyr!"

"A strange ambition," you say, "for a nineteenth century child — this thirst for martyrdom." But the Catholic Church has martyrs in every age, and in the last century her record was no less glorious than in any which preceded it. A true Catholic has no fear of sufferings and death. Certainly if any form of cruelty could have frightened this young soldier of Christ, the story of Father Cornay's martyrdom ought to have done so, for he was literally dismembered.

It would almost seem that Théophane Vénard foresaw on this occasion the manner and place of his own death. This much is certain: his subsequent assignment to Tongking, rather than to any other mission field, was made by his superiors in Paris without any knowledge of the youth's preference. And from his cage, on the eve of his martyrdom he wrote to Eusebius:

By the time you receive this letter your brother's head will have fallen. . . . *That was the dream of my youth.* When, as a little man, nine years old, I used to take my pet goat to browse on the slopes of Bel-Air, I loved to say to myself, "And I, too, will go to Tongking, and I, too, will be a martyr!"

Eusebius tells that on this occasion, soon after the children had finished their reading, M. Vénard,

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

coming out from the town, joined the little group, and was suddenly met with the question from Théophane, "Father, how much is this field worth?" The father could not say and asked why he wished to know. The little fellow answered at once, "Because if you could let me have it now as my share, I would sell it and then I would go to college and study." These words, so seriously uttered by the boy, affected his father, who within a short period of time arranged for the education of his son.

We did not stay long at Bel-Air. The day was perfectly clear but the sun was scorching and there was little shade. I half suspected, however, that even under more favorable conditions, my venerable host would have preferred not to remain. He had long dreamed of his beautiful chapel at Bel-Air, to which he would transfer from his own home and from Paris the relics and souvenirs of his martyred Théophane. The plans of the building were all prepared and he had often thought of this shrine as completed, with priests climbing the hill to offer Mass there, and devout pilgrims coming from near and far to venerate the relics. But that was many years ago and today the lonely apse, roughly boarded against the passing storm, only laughs at his dream.

Théophane Vénard is one of many martyrs in France, and it is not easy to arouse widespread enthusiasm among people to whom Christian hero-

## ASSAIS AND ST. LOUP

ism is nothing new. And since troublous times had fallen upon the country, even if the money had been forthcoming, it would have been unwise to build in a land where no property was sacred. The relics of Théophane Vénard, with those of other martyrs from the *Rue du Bac*, had been recently moved to another country. The old brother could hardly enjoy such a reminder of his disappointed hopes as was Bel-Air, so we started down the hill again, towards the town.

Ahead of us I saw a group of children, just dismissed from school. Most of them were hastening to their homes, laughing merrily, but we caught up to two who loitered after the rest, — a boy and a girl, bearing the same family resemblance in faces that were gentle and full of reverence. Had it been an earlier generation, Théophane and Mélanie might have been their names.

We escorted *la petite mademoiselle* to her waiting mother, who regaled us with some of the famous St. Loup cheese — an indescribable, dust-covered concoction — while one of the seminarians and their brother who had just returned from the fields hitched up our horse. We called to say good-by to the Curé and were soon on the road to Assais, where M. Henry, the *bonne*, and Kebis were anxiously awaiting our return.

Full justice was done to the excellent dinner prepared for us. Then, when the Curé's cigarette-

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case had been returned to its place on the mantel, we sauntered out in the cool of the evening to inquire for our three companions and to express our thanks for the use of the family "rig." A few moments brought us to the door of the Huctin house, a typical French village home of stone and plaster, with tiled roof. Our entrance caused much commotion, but order was soon restored and I found myself in a good-sized dining-room, with the kitchen fireplace at one end, a dresser opposite, and against the rear wall two stately, high-draped beds.

A door which opened on the right revealed several stalls, including one for the faithful beast that had given us our day's outing. The table was bountifully laden with bread, lettuce and vegetables; a bottle with a long-necked attachment passed occasionally from one to another of the occupants, each of whom in turn, without touching the decanter to the lips, skilfully poured a stream of red wine with unerring aim into his wide-open mouth. Farm-hands ate with the members of the family, and when the repast was over the good mother of the household pointed out on the wall a picture of her daughter, the nun in India, and rehearsed the beautiful letter which had come from the little missionary only a few days before.

The full moon was shining over the church steeple as we returned along the cemetery wall to

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the presbytery; and that night, as I read again the martyr's letters which hung on my chamber wall, I felt that a harvest of precious and useful memories had been gathered from the day's pilgrimage to Bel-Air.

# V

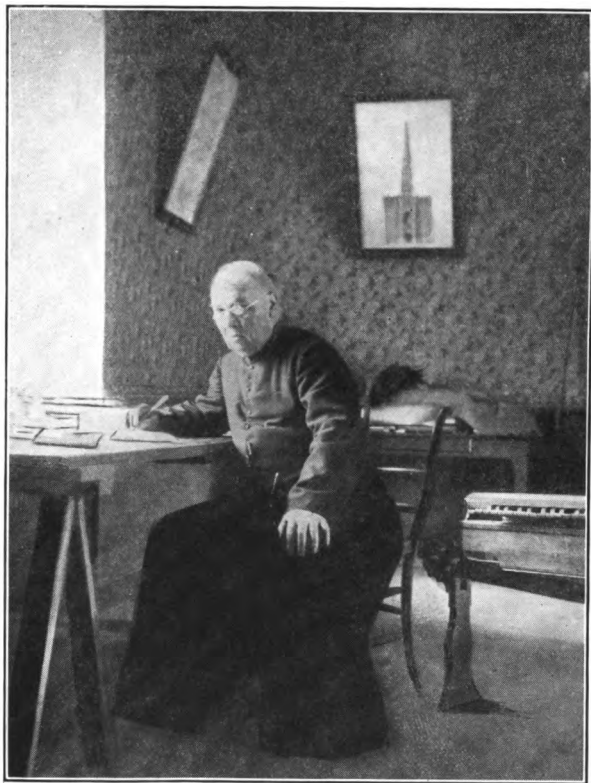
## A SUNDAY WITH THE ABBÉ VÉNARD



A GRANDE MESSE was to be chanted at 9.30 in Assais. Now it was no extraordinary occurrence to have High Mass on Sunday in this little village, but, for the first time in the recollection of the oldest inhabitant, a priest from America was to officiate, and the occasion was an interesting one, — at least to the stranger.

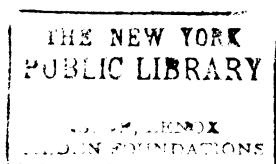
The day was clear and the sun hot on the white walls of the presbytery, by the time the people began to arrive in little groups, as the old bell rang out the third and last call. Most of the villagers in St. Loup are church-goers; and the white-coiffed matrons and young girls, neatly dressed men and small boys, passed around the Curé's wall into the court which served as an approach to the church.

I was preparing to leave the garden walk for the sacristy when the presbytery door opened, and the sexton, a sun-burnt toiler clad in homespun, came rapidly across the yard carrying under one arm a strange-looking piece of furniture on which I no-



**CANON EUSEBIUS VÉNARD IN HIS STUDY**





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ticed two octaves of ivory keys with an extended string of cat-gut. A fiddle bow dangled from his little finger, and I began to realize that I was in danger of a few distractions. I followed into the cool sanctuary, blessed the water, and prepared for the celebration. Fortunately, during the Asperges I became acquainted with and resigned to the instrument of torture which I had already discovered. It was a monochord, used to sustain the chant of the congregation. The recent "*motu proprio*" on church music hardly needed a promulgation in St. Loup, where for generations the people have been accustomed to render the old chant of the Church with its varying modes.

As soon as the Asperges had been intoned, the sexton, who had installed his instrument on the Gospel side of the sanctuary, began to saw vigorously with the violin bow, regulating the tones by pressing in turn the yellow keys that lay beneath his muscular left hand. Beside him, in unconscious dignity, stood one of his fellow musicians, also within the sanctuary, but decently dressed in civilian's clothes, and practically hidden behind a huge parchment-bound "Graduale," from which long ribbon markers hung, soiled by wear. Across the sanctuary, in best cassocks and stainless surplices, were Basil, Alfred, and Valentine, the three seminarians, with *M. le Curé* presiding over all behind the episcopal kneeler, seconding, or rather

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

eclipsing, the efforts of the head chanter. It was not often that the good pastor had such an opportunity as this, and it was quite natural that he should take advantage of it.

Outside the chancel there was activity, too. Some of the worshipers used books; more, including the *bonne*, who occupied a kneeler in the first row, were so familiar with the chant and the Latin words that they could easily dispense with the text. The voices were not particularly sweet, and the accompaniment, as may be imagined, was far from soothing, but the entire Mass, with Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Offertory, Sanctus and Communion, was chanted correctly and intelligently by these simple people.

The presence of the stranger offered a subject, if not a text, for the Curé. After the Gospel he ascended the narrow steps which led to the pulpit, high perched against a stalwart column, and paid tribute to the American who had explored their wilderness, drawn thither by his love for the martyr of St. Loup. He told the people how they should appreciate the virtues of the "Venerable" when one would come from so great a distance to make a pilgrimage to his birthplace and to see his relatives.

Incidentally during his remarks the old priest apologized for the stranger's shortcomings, saying that the latter had a very peculiar pronunciation

## ASSAIS AND ST. LOUP

of the Latin, but in spite of this could sing pretty well. Perhaps he expected some Indian wail. In any event no one dared to smile at the comment, which was given out with perfect seriousness.

The Angelus rang after Mass. The people again congregated in little groups outside the church, then moved on to their homes. Soon afterwards we were sipping coffee freshly made by the trembling hands of the smiling old *bonne*, who now enjoyed the distinction of a personal acquaintance with the *prêtre sauvage*, and could whisper her observations occasionally to some visitor at the garden gate, when the Curé was not looking.

The sun was well down on the long horizon when the old bell rang again for Vespers, and the people gathered for what proved to be a memorable service.

In the course of the afternoon, the stranger, who had been studying the mechanism of the wonderful monochord — which Father Eusebius was seriously thinking of replacing with an instrument slightly improved on the same general lines — learned that there was a harmonium on the premises. A few months earlier when the "Captivity and Martyrdom of the Venerable Théophane" was enacted in the courtyard of the presbytery, a real harmonium was rented from Poitiers, and for that occasion an organist was secured. The instrument was still waiting to be returned.

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

Now the American had spent many hours, weary and otherwise, during his seminary course, at the bench of an enlarged harmonium, and as soon as this knowledge was revealed to the Curé, a special program of psalms and hymns was prepared for the Vesper and Benediction service, and the Curé gave more self-satisfied grunts than usual that afternoon.

That evening after dinner, as we strolled around the cemetery wall, he insisted on stopping wherever he found a group of people to get their estimate of the day's happenings, and to receive their approbation of the special menu which he had so thoughtfully provided for their spiritual and sensible appetites.

I had begun to warm to the good old priest by this time, and looked forward with regret to the day of departure, which I had decided should be the following Tuesday.

## VI

### *ADIEU TO ASSAIS*



T was Monday afternoon and I was nearing the end of a most agreeable and profitable visit. My host had been interrupted while reading aloud to me the letters of his martyred brother, Théophane, and was on his way to a sick call. He had started, it must be confessed, with poor grace, fully aware that it was only the whim of a nervous hypochondriac that had called him from his absorbing occupations to a hot and dusty walk beyond the outskirts of his parish.

I continued for some time alone, reading the finely written manuscript, and about an hour before sun-down ventured a short walk around the village. I had only to follow the outline of the cemetery, where, in raised earth protected by a massive wall, the villagers had placed their dead within the very shadows of the roofs which in life had sheltered them. Now this promenade should have taken a short ten minutes, but the peasants were returning from the fields, and as by this time the visitor was no longer a stranger, he was naturally delayed.

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

The peasants of Assais are not ambitious and the horizon line of their daily life does not extend any considerable distance, but they are keen and anxious to learn when an opportunity is afforded them. A few ideas at first hand concerning the United States would serve them as a capital asset for future occasions, social and otherwise; so it is not to be wondered at that the unsuspecting American was soon drawn into an interested circle.

All seemed to be going well, and, for a time, as I noted the intent expression on the faces of the little group surrounding me, I felt that I was imparting useful information. Soon, however, I became aware of a counter-attraction. My back was turned to the cemetery and over my shoulders the eyes of my hearers were wandering while inexplicable smiles played on their lips. At length I turned, and there across the street, high above us, leaning over the wall with threatening gestures, was *M. le Curé*. He soon descended to where we were standing and explanations followed. He had returned to the presbytery and found his guest flown. The *bonne* had searched the church. Then fearing some evil hand, he had come out into the cemetery, taking it as an observation point, and there discovered me trying to wean the affections of his people and steal the parish from him. With an assumedly serious countenance he took me somewhat roughly by the arm and marched me back to

## ASSAIS AND ST. LOUP

the house. The little flurry cleared before the evening meal began and when the lamp was lighted we settled down again to the reading and to a final chat before my departure.

It was late that night when we retired, but both of us were on hand for early Masses the next morning; and breakfast was hardly over when the springless vehicle, carrying the three seminarians, halted outside the garden gate. I need not linger over the adieus. The patriarchal Henry was most cordial and his faithful Kebis seemed friendly now that the stranger was leaving. The *bonne*, dressed for the occasion, gave every possible evidence that the American had been a welcome guest. With a promise to return, and a wave of the hand, we were soon on the road to Airvault, the nearest railway station which the main line touches from Bordeaux to Paris.

Father Eusebius said little, though I felt that in his mind was a thought which he had already expressed several times, that old age was creeping on him, and that this might be our last meeting on earth, unless I should return soon to France. The drive was pleasant withal, and the companionship of Basil, Alfred, and Valentine brightened it not a little. The five miles were soon covered and we drove past the old church through the line of houses to the little railway station.

We had not long to wait for the train, which

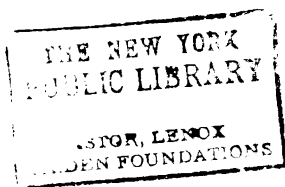


## ASSAIS AND ST. LOUP

stole slowly in as Eusebius gave me a final embrace. I was the only passenger from Air-vault, and with three pairs of bright young eyes to help me I soon found an empty compartment. With "*Bon voyage!*" from dear old Father Eusebius and his budding priests still ringing in my ears, I settled down to my journey, thankful for all that I had seen and heard to edify my poor soul — battered by the ceaseless cares of priestly life in a busy American city.



*"The patriarchal Henry was cordial and his faithful Kebis  
seemed friendly."  
(Page 145)*



## VII

### A LAST VISIT TO FATHER VÉNARD



It was in August, 1911, and I was returning from Rome with the glad news that the late Holy Father, Pius X., had approved the establishment of an American Seminary for Foreign Missions. In Paris at the *Rue du Bac*, where Théophile Vénard had prepared for his mission, I learned, as I had learned eight years before, that the martyr's brother was yet alive.

I had often written to the dear old Curé since my first visit, and had in fact managed to spend a few days with him in the summer of 1910, but I knew that he had sung his "Nunc Dimittis" in Rome the day his beloved Théophile was beatified, and that he had been failing in health ever since.

At Airvault, the nearest railway station to Assais, the village over which Father Eusebius presided as pastor, I found the favorite parishioner waiting with his cumbersome cart to drive me over the plains, but the face that I longed to see was missing and I realized that my venerable friend was no longer strong enough to travel.

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

I found him waiting for me in the garden and as I pushed open the old gate — the solitary break in a high stone wall — he rose to embrace me.

“*Le dernier fois,*” he murmured, — “the last time,” — but I reassured him, and arm in arm we entered the house.

He stopped several times in that short passage to describe the stiffness of his poor old rheumatic leg; and after the laborious ceremony of settling himself at his accustomed place in the living-room — which was also his dining-room — he continued the story of his illness; but soon, as always, he was back to the one subject that had dominated his life — *le Bienhereux*, as he proudly referred to his martyr-brother.

I glanced around the familiar room occasionally and noted a few changes. The daguerreotypes of Théophane and Mélanie had been brought down stairs from the guest-room and hung above the mantel. One chair had been covered with some purple calico, already faded, in honor of the Curé’s elevation to the position of an honorary canon, but the place looked poorer and less tidy than ever.

The *bonne* came in to light the lamp, and as I introduced myself — a necessary precaution — my mind went back to her predecessor, now in a little dust quiescent but then ready for a talk whenever the Curé’s back was turned. The new *bonne*, who was really *antique*, looked at me sus-

## ASSAIS AND ST. LOUP

piciously, and quickly retired to work up the fire with the bellows that, I had noticed in passing, was still doing service in the kitchen.

This led to questions about the parishioners whose acquaintance I had previously cultivated.

I learned that the Huctin family, which had already given four foreign missionaries to the Church, had that day been presented with a new baby; that M. —, whose wine was the talk of the *department*, had continued always kind and generous; that the sexton, whose performance on the monochord — a species of harmonium that saws out notes in chunks — had so disturbed my first High Mass in Assais, was away on a little holiday; and that Father Eusebius was no longer a solitary Curé, but in these his declining years had accepted from the Bishop of Poitiers an offer of a *vicaire*, — an assistant.

I breathed more freely when I learned that the *vicaire* was having a couple of days off, — an arrangement, I believe, which was initiated by the announcement of my visit. I should, of course, have been happy to salute the young priest, and perhaps I could have secured from him much that would have been useful and interesting to a friend of the Vénard family, *but* — having often met old pastors and young curates, and talked with each separately, I feared to be disabused about my venerable host, whom I had already on former oc-

## IN THE HOMES OF MARTYRS

casions gauged as a delightful old crank with a heart of pure gold tried by many a fire.

An important item of news that Father Eusebius soon gave me was that a new bell had been placed in the old church in honor of the martyr, and the old gentleman impressively announced that it would be rung the next morning in honor of the visitor.

In the course of the evening I learned that all arrangements had been made to guard the treasury of relics and souvenirs which had been to Father Eusebius what gold is to a miser. The most precious things were still in the presbytery, and we looked them over the following morning; but I soon realized that it would be useless even to hint a desire to possess them, and I watched the trembling hands wrap each in its fold of cloth and lay it reverently away.

At noon of the next day, my last at Assais, the bell rang violently, and I was suddenly aware of its significance,—but nothing happened. The village had grown accustomed to the signal that some stranger was visiting the celebrated Curé. On this occasion, however, it served the purpose of calling to the church a little group of parishioners with the Huctin baby,—a future missionary, doubtless, this niece (or was it the nephew?) of three priests and their sister in Eastern Asia. The Curé remained at home while the guest baptized the child and later visited the happy household.

## ASSAIS AND ST. LOUP

That afternoon I said *adieu* to Eusebius Vénard,  
— for *le dernier fois*.

Some months later the Curé of St. Loup, where  
the Vénard family was reared, and where today  
the martyr's relics are kept, sent me word of my  
old friend's death.

### THE END

*For theirs is the kingdom of  
heaven, who loved not their lives  
in this world, and have attained  
unto the reward of the kingdom,  
and have washed their robes in  
the blood of the Lamb.*

*(Roman Breviary)*















APR 30 1954

